ISSUE #59: THE SPORT REPORT

MLB THE SHOW 22

NINTENDO SWITCH SPORTS

POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET

KIRBY AND THE FORGOTTEN LAND

LEGO STAR WARS: THE SKYWALKER SAGA

ADVANCE WARS 1+2: RE-BOOT CAMP

TRIANGLE STRATEGY

RUNE FACTORY 5

FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS: THREE HOPES

CHRONO CROSS: THE RADICAL DREAMERS EDITION

SPIDERSAURS

TRAPPED IN THE PAST: MEGA MAN SOCCER

MARIO KART 8 DELUXE: BOOSTER COURSE PASS

MAY/ JUNE 2022

THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR GONINTENDO

FOR MUCH OF the past year, GoNintendo was GoneNintendo. Site creator (and Nintendo Force team member!) Kevin Cassidy, also known as RawmeatCowboy, took a step back from posting new updates and videos for a much-needed mental health break. The sudden loss of daily GoNintendo posts came as a shock to many of the most diehard Nintendo fans online, as they had just been so frequent leading up to that point — but of course, the huge volume of posts, reporting on all happenings big and small in the game industry, was ultimately a big contributor to the need for Kevin to back away and rest for a while!

Thankfully, after roughly a year of recuperation, Kevin is now back in action. But he's not alone! GoNintendo has just been relaunched with an all-new team of creators collectively contributing content (and working to ease the heavy burden that Kevin previously shouldered too much of by himself). The relaunch has coincided with a fresh revamp of the site's design, a more organized backend and an expanded scope — you'll now be able to enjoy feature articles and more reviews mixed in with returning hits like the My Parents Play video series and the weekly GoNintendo Podcast.

If GoNintendo fell out of your regular reading rotation over the past year, get that bookmark restored! GoNintendo is GoneNoMore! **— LUCAS**

GoNintendo.com

P.S. If you're also able to pitch in and support Kevin and his team financially, visit **Patreon.com/GoNintendo**!

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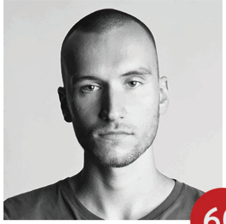
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ON THE COVER

Here's a crazy tidbit of trivia: Despite the Mario Strikers series being widely known and praised for its especially striking style of promo art, Nintendo Power denied both previous installments a placement on NP's cover! So, to do our part to make up for the GameCube's Super Mario Strikers and the Wii's Mario Strikers Charged not getting enough love when they were released years ago, we're awarding the cover spot of our 59th edition to Mario Strikers: Battle League!

INBOX

TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAMES

Did you know my Dad was almost an NBA star? He just missed out because of two things: He was a foot too short and had no talent!

Yes, that's a favorite joke of my father's, but it does ring true for a lot of us – some people are born with natural potential for athletic achievement, while most of the population will never get the chance to score a touchdown in front of a crowd of millions, or sink a winning putt to claim the coveted green jacket. But that's where video games step in! Through the power of virtual versions of these same athletic events, anyone can go pro in nearly any sport imaginable.

Nintendo has presented dozens of incredible sports video games over the decades, and as we head to press with this NF issue, they're in the midst of doing it twice more: an all-new sequel to the global phenomenon, Wii Sports, has just gone on sale for Nintendo Switch, and in June we will also get to gear up for a third installment of Mario's personal soccer series in Mario Strikers: Battle League. To support both releases, we've crafted this sports-spotlighting NF issue!

Our central feature, The Sport Report, is a big collection of retrospectives going sport by sport to chronicle the individual histories of basketball, baseball, tennis, golf and many more through their decades' worth of adaptations on Nintendo systems. We've got an interview with the creator of Golf Club: Wasteland, a review of the Switch debut of MLB The Show and even a look back at the Famista baseball franchise from our own Tony Ponce . . . whose father actually was a pro baseball player! (I guess some Dads don't have to just joke about hitting the big leagues!) If all that sounds good to you, then let's play ball!

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #58: MARCH/APRIL 2022

Kirby claimed the cover of our last edition, and rightfully so, as it turns out that Kirby and the Forgotten Land is just as wonderful as we'd all hoped it would be! We've got our full review ready for you to read later on in this issue, so flip ahead to Page 72 if you'd like to go straight to our assessment. Then flip back here, because we've got Player's Poll responses to get to!

Last time we asked for you to tell us your thoughts on some sports topics. First, we wanted to know if our fans were also fans of the sports video game genre in general, and, if so, when that fandom began. Next we asked for everyone's dream Mario sports game – which sport he should play that he hasn't already. Finally, with Nintendo Switch Sports bringing motion controls back to the forefront, we wondered how our readers feel about physically moving to play!

LETTERS

This is my first time sending a response to the Player's Poll. Hope you print it in the magazine!

Wii Sports Bowling was the first time I beat my oldest brother at a game. We have Mario Strikers Charged and I'm looking forward to this new one!

If it counts as a sport, ballet would be fun to see (especially as Bowser).

Sports game motion control is great unless it expects very specific movements. It helps me get into games.

– KYLA H.

I have been a fan of sports video games since the mid-'90s! My group of friends would spend countless hours playing NHL '94, Madden '95 and NBA Jam for the SNES. My wife (then girlfriend) introduced me to Mario Tennis for the N64 and it's been a staple at family parties ever since.

I think it would be interesting to see a new take on a Mario basketball game.

I would definitely prefer to just press buttons for sports games. Mario sports games have very tight controls and can get real competitive, which is awesome!

– CARLOS DELGADO

Does Rocket League count? If so, yes, I have played a sports game.

I think it would be awesome if Mario played – wait for it – cornhole. I think it would be hilarious to see Bowser trying to land a bag and horribly missing.

I think motion controls are OK in sports games. But when I've played Wii Sports Boxing, I've lost every time against a Level 1 A.I.! **– BENJAMIN HILTY**

I am a mediocre fan of sport games. While I have three different sports games for my Switch (R.B.I. Baseball 20, NBA 2K22 and FIFA 22), I really only play them if my brother or Dad challenge me to a match. I started playing when I got my Switch with R.B.I. 18.

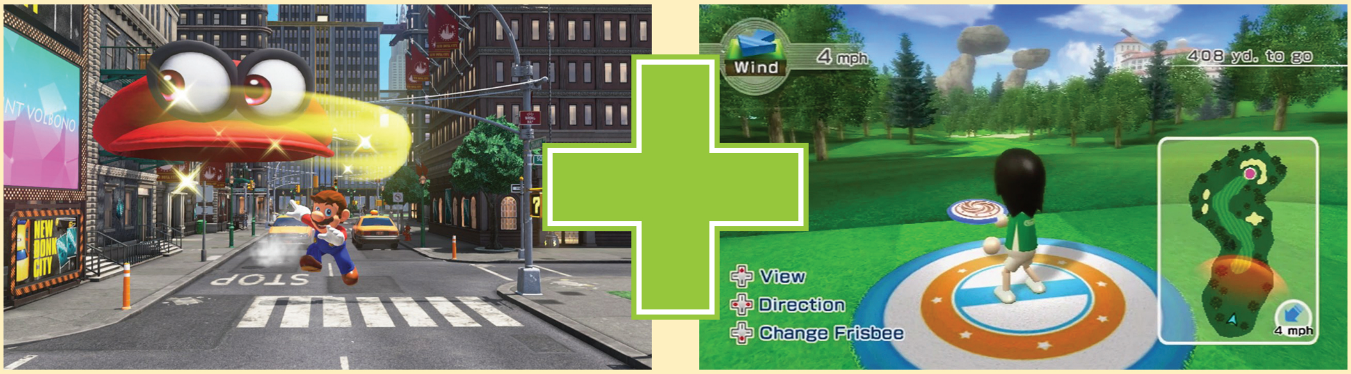
I've only played one Mario sports game: Mario Super Sluggers on a friend's Wii. I think a Mario boxing game would be really fun. I kind of picture it like a Punch-Out!! and Mario Golf: Super Rush hybrid.

Motion controls are a mixed subject for me. I really enjoy playing on the Wii, and thought the Mario Galaxy spin move was clever and a good use of the motion controls. But on the Switch it's always a bit too much of a gimmick for me, like when they announced that the new Switch Sports would use the Ring Fit Adventure leg strap just for kicking a soccer ball. It's safe to say that in my opinion, button controls make for a more enjoyable gaming experience.

– MILO L.

I've been a fan of sports video games since I first played NBA Jam. Since then, I prefer more animated sports games like Wii Sports, Mario Golf and Rocket League. I never got into the more realistic sports games such as Madden or NBA 2K, but would consider trying an MLB game.

I think Mario should host a hockey video game next. They've done a couple basketball games on DS and Wii that I never got to play, so a basketball game would also be fun. Especially if it had online gameplay. **– DAN P.**



SWAPPING CAPPY FOR A FRISBEE?

What sport should Mario play next? Disc golf! **— QUINN WADE**

I have enjoyed some sports video games on the Wii, such as Wii Sports, which I have been playing my whole life. I haven't really played any Mario sports games, but I would really like to give them a try!

I think Mario should have a track & field game, since we already know his top skill is jumping.

And I do like motion controls in sports games, because you really feel like you're playing a sport! **— ABBY DANE**

I am a fan of sports video games . . . I just don't play them that much. I first started playing them when I got my Switch, last Christmas.

I liked Mario Hoops on the DS, so I want another Mario basketball game. But for a new sport I would want Mario to play . . . maybe lacrosse?

Sometimes motion controls are good, but sometimes they stink, so I gotta go with buttons.

Also there are 99 Kirbys! **— TANJIRO17**

You may have missed a few!

While sports simulations have always felt a little too in the weeds for me, I enjoy over-the-top sports games. From Tecmo Super Bowl with my Dad and brother to college night with Sega Soccer Slam (how's that for a deep cut?), sports games with a cartoonish feel always felt more fun. My wife and I joke that we fell in love on the links of Toadstool Tour. Haven't parted ways with our GameCube copy and have greatly enjoyed playing Mario Golf: Super Rush!

I don't know that I would want any new sports — more just the promise of continuing to visit the other ones with each new generation. Soccer, tennis, golf and even the Olympic outings are so universal because they happen on a global scale. However, a competitive eating mode in Mario Party could be fun. Maybe a Mushroom power-up so that characters could eat more? **— ADAM RENARD**

I had not even considered the possibility of Joey Chestnut Presents Major League Eating!

I may not be a huge fan of lifelike sports games, but give me just about any Mario sports game since Mario Golf 64 and I'm good to go! I love that fun charm that only that series can bring, gimmicks and all.

If Mario and friends were to get into a new sport, I'd have to say it's time for some (American) football. It may not be my favorite sport — that honor goes to baseball — but with as big as it is, I feel it would not only sell well, but have that unique Mario charm that most modern football games just don't have.

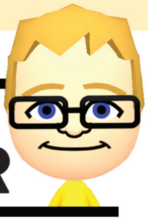
As for motion control in sports games, I think it definitely has its place and can be a lot of fun, but I feel it's been a bit done to death at this point. I'm pretty torn, to be honest, but ultimately I'd say buttons are the safe way to go. If you want realistic motion, just go try to find a place to play the sport in real life! **— JOSHUA TAYLOR**

I think motion controls in sports games have their place. For a simpler game, motion controls could improve the experience greatly if done well. That's why something like Wii Sports is something special to so many people. I don't think more complex games that require a lot of management would greatly be improved by motion controls, though. **— MATTHEW F.**

I am a fan of "sports adjacent" games. Titles like NFL Blitz, NBA Jam and Super Mario Strikers. These games are all based on the original sports, but they take the sports to an extreme, unrealistic level that makes them fun. No one is ever going to be able to dunk a basketball that's on fire while leaping 50 feet into the air doing front flips the entire time, but I can do that in NBA Jam any day and it's awesome!

Mario has really touched a lot of sports in his various outings — especially if you consider things like Mario & Sonic at the Olympics. I think they should take dodgeball from Mario Sports Mix and turn it into a full-fledged series! **— KURT PRENGER**

CARTER'S CORNER



And we're back again!

In our last issue, I gave you a new counting challenge: How many Kirbys could you find in the whole issue? After careful counting, the answer is . . . 136! Mouthful Modes counted too. Maybe I should try to eat a car?

And now, the newest Pokémon games, Scarlet & Violet! So far, we only know three Pokémon: Sprigatito, Fuecoco and Quaxly, the new starters! Fuecoco is the new Fire-type starter, a cool fire crocodile! Quaxly is the new Water-type starter, a tidy duck. And last — but definitely not least — Sprigatito is the new Grass-type starter, a cute cat! I've always picked the Grass-type starter in Pokémon games, and I won't stop now! Also, I would never refuse a cat. If I could go back and play every past game, I'd always pick the Grass starter. (But not Chespin — Fennekin is too cute for that. Also, I would never refuse a fox. Or a cat, in this case. Wait, I already said that!)

By the way, I've been having fun playing Kirby and the Forgotten Land. I loved Clawroline, Sleep Kirby and all the midbosses. I've even beaten the game!

Quiz time! Who's my favorite warden in Pokémon Legends: Arceus? I'll tell you next time. Feel free to take a nap while you wait!

CONGRATS TO DASH!

We've got another Player's Poll winner to present! Dash Brooks wrote in to answer the Kirby questions we asked in Issue #57, got his idea for a "Robo Kirby" Copy Ability printed in #58 and is now back again here in Issue #59, showing off the free copy of Kirby and the Forgotten Land he earned from having his name selected as the Poll winner! You can tell Dash was a Kirby connoisseur even before this starring role in the pages of our fine publication, because check out that great Warp Star shirt and the accompanying artwork with even more Kirbys riding in the wake of another Warp Star! We're always happy to see our Player's Poll prizes land in the hands of players who'll truly appreciate them. Well done, Dash, and enjoy your new game!

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Quinn Wade**, the winner of our sports-themed Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to some questions about the brawler genre!

QUESTION #1

Have you played a beat-'em-up or brawler game before? If so, what was the first one you played, and when did you play it? Any fond memories there?

QUESTION #2

Nintendo's never done much first-party-wise with the brawler genre. Which of their brands would be best suited to it?

QUESTION #3

WayForward brought River City back from the past with a great modern re-imagining. Which old beat-'em-up game would you want revived next?

Send your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #60" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win the new River City Girls 2 for Nintendo Switch!

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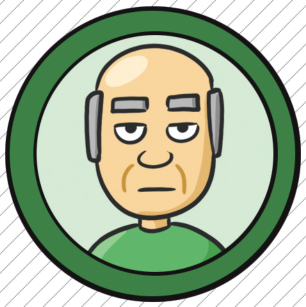
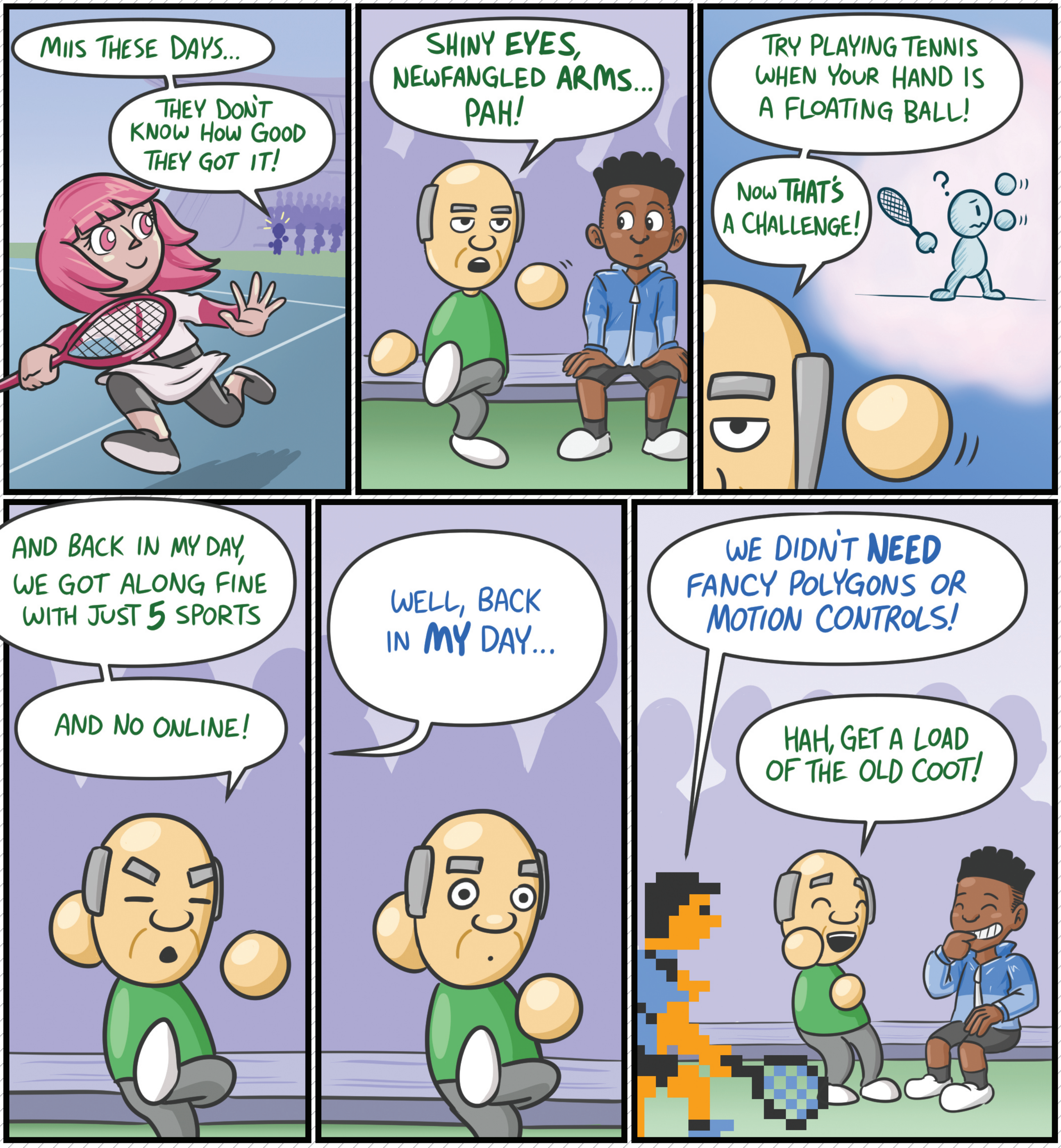


A Mii in... Console Generations



BY MATTHEW TARANTO

NEWS

Advance Wars Retreats a Second Time

Nintendo's postponed the product out of respect for the people of Ukraine.

IT HAPPENED AGAIN.

Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp was first revealed to exist last June. A two-in-one remake of both Advance Wars and Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising from the Game Boy Advance, Re-Boot Camp was given a release date right when it was announced: December 3, 2021. That felt like a long while to wait for Advance Wars fans taking in the shocking news of the series suddenly getting revived after being inactive for over a decade, but we were more than happy to endure it. Because hey, Advance Wars was back!

2021 rolled on. That December date slowly crept ever closer, and as we neared the end of the year we here at NF decided to celebrate the impending release of the game by making our November/December issue a whole celebration of the Wars series! The cover art went to Re-Boot Camp as we timed our print production cycle to sync up with Nintendo's announced release plans, as we always do. But just as we were wrapping up work on that issue, the news broke: The game was being delayed at the last minute.

Re-Boot Camp got booted out of 2021 and into 2022, presumably since it wasn't quite ready for showtime yet. The developers at WayForward needed more time to polish its presentation and test its online multiplayer features – or at least, that's what we've heard. Maybe we'll get more details in the future.

No worries, though, right? Fans had waited so long already, so waiting a few more months was no major concern. The game went without a release date for a while, but then got a new date locked in: April 8. We were back in business!

. . . Until, well, it happened again.

This is our May/June 2022 NF issue, and we're unfortunately still waiting for the release of this now twice-delayed game! Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp missed its planned April 8 debut date – but not because it needed even more development time. This second delay of Advance Wars, sadly, was decided upon in response to an actual war that has broken out in Ukraine.

Following months of build-up and mounting tension, Russia launched a coordinated attack against multiple cities and military targets in Ukraine beginning on February 24. The attacks – which are sadly still ongoing as we publish this issue – have been decried by the rest of the world, and nations like the United States have been quick to respond with sanctions against Vladimir Putin's Russian government. Millions of Ukrainians have fled the country, while millions more remain and are living in an active warzone. Thousands – soldiers and civilians both – have been killed in the conflict.

As this real war rages on, it could quite understandably be considered insensitive for Nintendo to publish and promote a new video game that presents war like a colorful cartoon. So the company made the call to push back Advance Wars once again, and it now is a release in limbo with no new date announced. As the game was so close to being launched and was likely already through the manufacturing process, it was probably an expensive choice for Nintendo to make, and so they should be commended for that. If only we lived in a world where they wouldn't have had to make it!

> "Since the game is done and physical copies are probably already made, I'm not too worried about Re-Boot Camp never seeing the light of day. It should come out at some point. Really, the situation just reinforces in my mind how blessed my life is – that I have the privilege of being able to worry about things like video game delays when others are fighting for their lives. We're with you, Ukraine."
> – **LUCAS**

> I'd hoped this would be the rare major Zelda release that wouldn't be hit with a delay like this, but alas, it's following the floundering footsteps of its forebears. I do maintain that this is more of a business call than a need for extra development time. 2022 is just so packed with other great titles that Breath of the Wild 2 isn't needed quite yet! – **LUCAS**

Breath of the Wild 2 Will Miss 2022

The highly anticipated Legend of Zelda sequel is now planned to ship in Spring 2023.

IN ADDITION TO the Advance Wars delay, we must also sadly confirm that the next Legend of Zelda is falling further back on the release calendar.

On March 29, Zelda series producer Eiji Aonuma (with a new haircut!) presented a brief video to announce the delay. Previously, the game (still being referred to as "The Sequel to The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild" by Nintendo, but just "Breath of the Wild 2" by everyone else) was scheduled to launch in 2022. That release window was given less than a year ago, at E3 2021 last June. It was still the plan as 2022 began, and why we moved ahead with featuring Breath of the Wild 2 as part of our 2022 Year in Preview just two issues ago. But now, Breath of the Wild 2 will miss 2022.

"Spring 2023" is the new target the Zelda team is aiming for, and if the game is not pushed back again, that would place its release almost exactly six years after its predecessor debuted alongside the Switch hardware on March 3, 2017. In fact, keen calendar flippers in the Nintendo fandom have already noticed that March 3 once again falls on a Friday in 2023, and Fridays are when Nintendo always puts out new releases. So it's possible that the company is again looking at that same date – the first few days of March are about as far forward as you could stretch "Spring 2023," as the season wouldn't officially begin until the Vernal Equinox a few weeks later.

Also swirling in speculators' minds is the possibility that this return trip to Breath of the Wild's Hyrule might be paired again with a Switch hardware launch. The OLED Model will be a year and a half old at that point, and it's not unreasonable to consider that a third revision of the hardware could be ready to roll by then. Call it Switch Pro or Switch 2 or Switch 4K – a model that finally gives a visual boost to the TV viewing experience, not just enhancing the handheld screen, would be more than welcome as we leap back into action with Link.

Speaking of Link, Mr. Aonuma was kind enough to grant us another small glimpse at his BOTW2 look through the inclusion of a few seconds of fresh footage placed alongside his delay announcement and apology. We got our first clear look at his face, which remains uncorrupted by whatever dark magic has taken hold of his right arm. Not so lucky, though, has been the Master Sword, which appears to have been similarly infected by evil to the point of having its tip rusted away! We previously speculated that one goal of Link's quest in this sequel will be to stop the spread of the corruption enveloping his arm – now it looks like he'll also need to find a way to purify and reforge the Blade of Evil's Bane as well!

It's an intriguing new tease – but one that might have to last us for a while. With Breath of the Wild 2 now officially a 2023 game, we might have to endure the rest of 2022 without getting any more looks at its development at all! Stay patient, everyone!

KIRBY, KIRBY, KIRBY

The next wave of anniversary plushes revealed!

TAKE A LOOK back at the 30th anniversary image that was printed on the back of our last issue — it has a whole mess of 30 different Kirbys representing his various forms and games over the years. It seems like that same specific set of Kirbys is headlining the 30th anniversary merch we've been seeing unveiled!

The set of six plushes above are all Kirbys that appeared in that image (and they originally come from Kirby: Right Back at Ya!; Kirby's Dream Land 2; Kirby Air Ride; Kirby: Squeak Squad; Kirby's Dream Course and Kirby: Planet Robobot). Some of these have already seen a plush release, but each of these plushes comes with the 30th anniversary logo embroidered on it. Kine's is on his fin!

There are also some other plushes releasing featuring more Kirbys from the image that are taking the form of smaller plush straps: Dizzy Kirby is a stand-alone retail release, and yet another Kirby will be a prize release. I'm not sure my wallet can handle getting plushes of everything seen in the image, but I'm excited to see the "Kirby on Wheelie" in plush form, should it happen!

There is also a giant plush with Kirby's classic look that comes complete with a removable life-sized Star Rod that also has a little Kirby plush on the tip of the star. San-ei is sparing no expense!

BUILD-A-HEDGEHOG

Sonic and his pals have sped into Build-a-Bear stores.

THE SECOND SONIC movie has spun into theaters, and Build-a-Bear is coordinating its launch of Sonic plushes accordingly! Sonic, Tails and Knuckles all feature their looks from the new film. Knuckles is an online exclusive (and sold out very quickly). Sonic and Tails both have "gift sets" where they come with 5-in-1 sound modules loaded with quotes from the movie. Sonic even comes with his signature ring and shoes in the set, but each can also be purchased separately. (The Knuckles plush can't have sound added, sadly.)

There are also Sonic 2 shirts and jammies for regular Build-a-Bears to accessorize with. But just like Sonic himself, these will go fast!

BY BRETT MARTIN

Even More Monopoly!

This time the Junior version's been Mario-fied.

THE SUPER MARIO brand has obviously been performing quite well for the USAopoly company. Several different Monopoly versions featuring Mario and his friends, as well as a Mario Kart variant, have been made over the years. They even came out with a Super Mario Celebration board game for the 35th anniversary! Now they're planning to target a younger crowd with a Super Mario version of Monopoly Junior.

While all of the other Mario Monopoly games feature figures, this version will sadly only have cardboard cutouts on stands to represent the characters. Mario, Luigi, Yoshi and Peach are the playable game pieces. The game also comes with a coin button that can be pressed to play the coin sound each time the player receives coins.

Monopoly Junior is an abridged version of regular Monopoly meant to move faster and be less complicated than the original classic. "Power dice" determine how far you go on the board and also how many coins you get. Coins are then used to buy properties that you place your character stamp on. The person with the most properties at the end of the game wins!

This Super Mario edition features locations from the Mushroom Kingdom – all from New Super Mario Bros. U. Acorn Plains, Layer Cake Desert and more are here. Of course Peach's Castle and Bowser's Castle are on the board as well – but now they reside right next to each other to emulate Park Place and Boardwalk!

amiibo UPDATE

CAPCOM IS APPARENTLY a big fan of amiibo, as they're the only third party still supporting the brand! During their Monster Hunter Rise digital event in March, they announced new amiibo to be used in conjunction with the Sunbreak DLC coming this Summer. The three new amiibo are the new monster big bad, Malzeno, a "Canyne Malzeno X" Palamute and a "Felyne Malzeno X" Palico. Each will unlock layered armor in the game for your chosen character. The amiibo will also allow users to enter the in-game lottery to obtain items to help hunters. These will be released alongside the Sunbreak DLC on June 30.

In first-party amiibo news, Min-Min has just gone on sale as of April 29, while Steve and Alex have sadly been bumped out of their original Spring release window to "later in 2022." We also still need dates for Pyra, Mythra, Kazuya, Sephiroth and Sora to round out the Super Smash Bros. Ultimate collection. Do you think they'll all be completed by the time the next Switch is revealed?

Three Houses, Six Plushes

Fire Emblem friends are here for your hugs!

SAN-EI BOEKI'S LAST set of Fire Emblem plushes – featuring Marth, Roy Lucina, Ike and Corrin – sold like hotcakes, and we knew there would be more as soon as San-ei named the line the All-Star Collection! This second set was announced for a June 4 release and has six friends instead of five: Edelgard, Dimitri, Claude, Sothis and both the male and female Byleth.

I'm always amazed at the level of detail that San-ei can achieve with their plushes! Even with their chibi style, they're some of the most detailed takes on the characters I've seen. Which is important, because Fire Emblem characters wear some complicated outfits! Each plush will be around $25 and can be purchased through several import shops. Since the last set came over via Little Buddy (the North American distributing arm of San-ei) you could simply wait a while longer and shave off the shipping for this set.

Xenoblade Gets Bumped . . . Up!?

In an almost unprecedented move, Xenoblade Chronicles 3 has been un-delayed.

TO COUNTERBALANCE THE back-to-back bummers of both Advance Wars 1+2 and Breath of the Wild 2 getting bumped back, Nintendo had a surprise in store for long-suffering fans: Xenoblade Chronicles 3 has actually been moved further forward on the release calendar than originally planned!

Is this an un-delay? A hastening? An expeditement? We don't even have a good word for this phenomenon, so rare it is to see in the video game industry. This is an entertainment medium in which promising upcoming projects are constantly pushed back – they nearly never make plans for a launch and then shift those plans to a *closer* date on the calendar. It's almost unheard of!

And yet, that's what's happening here. Xenoblade Chronicles 3 was first announced this past February, and at that time it was also given a release month: September. Not an exact date, but a pretty narrow window all the same considering it was just revealed to exist. Now, though, Nintendo has shuffled their plans for the rest of 2022 and Xenoblade Chronicles has gotten a precise date: July 29, 2022. We'll get to play it over a full month earlier than originally intended!

Monolith Soft must be made of magic. It's hard not to draw comparisons at this point: In the time between the release of Breath of the Wild on March 3, 2017 and its sequel, now set for Spring 2023, Monolith will have shipped *five* different Xenoblade adventures. Five!

Xenoblade Chronicles 2 launched on December 1, 2017. Its standalone spin-off/prequel, Torna ~ The Golden Country, debuted on September 14, 2018. On May 29, 2020 we got the revamped Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition, and it included the all-new Future Connected epilogue adventure that served as a game unto itself as well. Finally, Xenoblade 3 will make five on July 29.

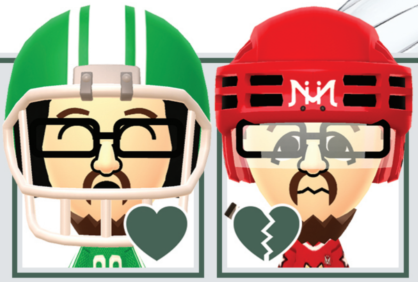
These are truly dialed-in developers if ever there were any, as they seem to have mastered the production pipeline on their projects to such a degree that they can just finish games early. No big deal!

In addition to Xenoblade 3's new July release date, Nintendo has also revealed that the game will be getting a Special Edition. It will ship in a large, artwork-adorned box (the dimensions of which likely match Xenoblade 1's Definitive Works Set from 2020), and inside you'll find the game itself, a steelbook case and the art book pictured above – a hardcover tome packed with over 250 pages of sure-to-be-incredible art of the characters and settings of the new adventure.

Interestingly, the Special Edition will be exclusively available through the My Nintendo Store. Keep an eye on **Nintendo.com/Store** to watch for when preorders go live. The quantity of Special Editions may be limited!

Delays are so commonplace that to be met with the opposite is as unnerving as it is welcome! **– LUCAS**

Great!
Xenoblade fans are getting fed earlier than expected!



Oh.
Zelda fans' tummies will still be grumble-grumbling.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

NEWLY ARRIVED ON store shelves as we're finalizing this issue is Nintendo's revival of the Wii Sports brand, now going by the name of Nintendo Switch Sports. The game launched on April 29 officially, but it's not exactly complete yet – it's still got more content coming in the future. We get into that topic on the very next page you'll flip to. And if you'd like to read our review of what's in the game so far, flip a bit further to Page 66!

WE COVERED THIS game's latest delay a few pages ago, and unfortunately we can't properly place it here on the Forecast as we're going to press. It could honestly launch at any time, as it's ready to go – it's just waiting on the greenlight from Nintendo's decision makers. Here's hoping that whenever it launches, it still finds an audience!

THE FIRST CONFIRMED future release date we can offer you – and one of the only notable launches set for the month of May as a whole – is Bandai Namco's Pac-Man Museum +, set to go on sale on May 27. Nintendo has a habit of surprise-releasing unexpected and/or more casual-leaning games around this time of year, though, so it's possible May won't be quite as empty as it seems going into it. (A 1-2-Switch sequel is being rumored.)

OUR COVER STAR for this NF Sports Spectacular is the long-awaited third installment in the Mario soccer series, Mario Strikers: Battle League. Its battles will begin on June 10, and if you're interested in it at all, you'll probably want to try to begin to play as close to that day as possible. The League might leave you behind otherwise! See Page 45.

A DIFFERENT KIND of battle – actually, 10 different kinds of battles – will arrive two weeks after Battle League, in the form of Capcom Fighting Collection on June 24. This is a new arcade game compilation from Capcom that's focusing on bringing a lot of the company's non-Street Fighter fighting games back from the past. (Though a bit of Street Fighter is included, of course.) Find out more on Page 51.

SLUGGING IT OUT for both shelf space and the spotlight on that same date on June 24 will be the next sequel in the Warriors series, Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes. It's shaping up to be a fascinating alternative take on the events of 2019's Fire Emblem: Three Houses – so much so that it will surely be a must-play for serious fans of that game!

> The delays to both Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp and The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild 2 have both reshuffled the schedule of 2022 seemingly for the worse, and we'll be hitting the midpoint of the calendar year with less momentum than I would've liked. Still, the back half of this year remains stuffed with heavy hitters like Xenoblade Chronicles 3, Splatoon 3, Bayonetta 3 and . . . well, mostly a bunch of 3s, it seems. **– LUCAS**

JUST AS OUR last issue theme was perfectly supported by Nintendo's February addition to the Nintendo 64 lineup available to Nintendo Switch Online subscribers (Majora's Mask meshed well with our apocalypse discussion), so to does the just-added April game perfectly support this issue's sports theme. It's Mario Golf from the Nintendo 64!

As golf games go, it's one of the best of the bunch, so I encourage you all to give it a shot if you happen to already be Expansion Pack NSO subscribers. And if you aren't, maybe take the plunge? Nintendo does seem to have locked down a more regular release schedule, for N64 games at least. We also got F-Zero X back in March, and if the trend continues we should see one more game in May, then one more in June, and so forth going forward.

Other first-party N64 sports games that may be added in the future include Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest, 1080° Snowboarding and Kobe Bryant in NBA Courtside. (Depending on licenses.)

NINTENDO SWITCH SPORTS

Driving Content Down Range

Nintendo Switch Sports will continue the Big N's trend of adding more to a game several months after launch.

GOOD NEWS! An all-new Sports series sequel is now available to play on Nintendo Switch. Bad news? Not all of Nintendo Switch Sports' sports are available to play quite yet.

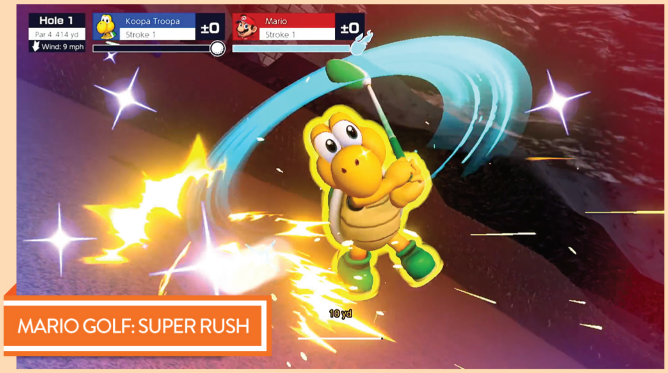
Nintendo did something a little out of character when announcing this Wii Sports successor back in February – they confirmed right up front that it would be incomplete when it went on sale in April. Six sports would be ready on Day 1, but Golf would have to wait. A planned update, scheduled to go live sometime in the Fall, will add the Golf mode to the Switch Sports mix – at no extra charge.

It's the latest example of Nintendo, I believe, working to extend the appeal and prominence of their products with what is essentially free DLC. Nintendo does plenty of paid DLC too – extra Smash fighters can join the Ultimate roster if you buy access to them, and your Pokémon trainer can travel to more monster-filled areas of the Galar region if you pay for that privilege too, just for two examples. But, more and more, the Big N is investing in bonus content for their big-name games with no ask for immediate financial compensation from their players.

I like it! . . . I think.

Listen, there are two ways you can react to Nintendo continuing to adopt this practice of holding some portion of content for their games for later on, waiting to release it until a few months after the original launch window. One: You can be angry about it, looking at it like Nintendo's willfully withholding a piece of the product that should just be there from the beginning alongside everything else. Or, two: You can let it go and go with the flow. Allow yourself to look at any extra content that gets added post-release as free bonuses, and enjoy them as they come.

I'm trying to do the latter.



MARIO GOLF: SUPER RUSH

MARIO TENNIS ACES

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

KIRBY STAR ALLIES

For some games it's easier than others, though! I'll confirm right up front that I'm having trouble keeping myself in a positive frame of mind about Nintendo Switch Sports in particular, and I think that's because Golf was one of the five original sports in Wii Sports way back in 2006. It just feels a bit wrong to know that it is on the way for the Switch sequel, but also that it wasn't prioritized to be there from the start. (Meanwhile Baseball and Boxing are total no-shows so far, but that's straying into another topic.)

I think I like free DLC best when it's fun extra content, but also when it doesn't feel too substantial. And there are lots of examples where Nintendo has done this well, in my opinion.

The Splatoon series really got this ball rolling. Back when its first game launched on Wii U in 2015, it had only five multiplayer maps in rotation. The earliest days of engaging with that game involved a whole lot of rinse-and-repeat in that handful of arenas – such that when Nintendo later began to open the floodgates and add more maps as free DLC in the months after launch, each one felt like a major event! The Wii U Splatoon community was small but mighty, and new map launches were major milestones on which the foundation for the success of that whole series was laid.

Even bigger than the now-huge Splatoon audience is the population of Animal Crossing fans, especially now that New Horizons has been enjoyed by over 37,000,000 players globally! And regular, free content updates have been critical in keeping that number growing ever since its launch in March 2020. Doling out content bit by bit has been baked into Animal Crossing's DNA ever since the series first started decades ago – as one of the first video games to connect itself to the real-world clock and calendar, it made patience a part of its gameplay from the start. Want to see snow on the ground in your village? You'll have to wait for winter to arrive outside your actual window. Want to celebrate a holiday? You'll have to wait for that actual date and log on to play within its 24-hour window . . . otherwise it would disappear for another year.

New Horizons continued that real-time connection, but also presented a slate of free DLC updates spaced out every few months to keep people enticed to constantly revisit their islands. An early update added the art gallery to the museum, alongside Redd (the often-shady art dealer). For the game's first summer season, new swimming and diving mechanics got added. When October rolled around, we got Halloween items and activities.

That's the kind of free DLC that I find myself appreciating the most: content that brings a community of players together to collectively enjoy something at the same time. And it makes sense for it to be spaced out as it is. I mean, yes, New Horizons could have included Halloween candy when it first went on sale in March, and the game would have technically been more complete if it had done so. But it wouldn't have been as much fun!

Isn't that wild – that the *lack* of something existing can actually lead to an increase in the amount of fun potential a video game can have. Take Brewster, for another Animal Crossing example. Being able to visit him and chill out in his coffee shop was highly requested by longtime fans of the series. But the fact that he wasn't there from the start gave the whole community a banner to rally behind for months on end – everyone united in their love of that odd bird's virtual brews. Ultimately, he was added, alongside a ton of other free content, for the game's big 2.0 version release over a year and a half after its original launch. The community cheered and shouted from the mountaintops about Brewster finally being in the game! Something that never would have happened if he'd just already been there brewin' brews from Day 1.

Nintendo gets it. They understand that they're ultimately going to sell a whole lot more copies of their games if they keep regularly giving players more and more reasons to get excited about and to talk about these same games over longer periods of time, rather than just doing one big marketing push leading up to launch day and then dropping them off the radar immediately afterward. Also, this practice of spreading content out over time surely eases the burden on developers, who don't have to have 100% of any given game's content complete by the time it's sitting on a store shelf. They can take more time to work on those extra worlds or extra modes or extra characters, then push them out the door digitally when they're finally ready for the spotlight. A lot of this content probably just wouldn't exist if the devs didn't get that extra time – it would just get cut out of the plan entirely, and we'd be left with lesser games in the end.

So, dear readers, I'll continue to try to react positively when Nintendo "holds back" game content in the future. I'd love to already be able to tee off in Nintendo Switch Sports, but waiting until Fall for Golf to be added is better than never getting Golf at all. And who knows? Maybe even more sports will follow! **– LUCAS**

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS

SPLATOON 2

eShop Sports Selections

Grab these great games before they're gone!

"ALL GOOD THINGS must come to an end." Unfortunately, this is now true for the Wii U and 3DS eShops, both scheduled to be shut down in March 2023. Luckily, we have plenty of time to prepare for this unfortunate situation – but there are some other important dates to remember.

First, the ability to use credit cards will no longer be available after May 23, 2022. Next, you will no longer be able to use eShop cards for store credit after August 29, 2022. After these dates, the only way you will be able to add funds to your account will be to link your Nintendo Network ID account to your 3DS and/or Wii U and merge your funds across all devices. This will allow the money you add to your Switch account to be shared to any linked device. Thankfully, you will still be able to redownload previously purchased games, DLC and updates for an unspecified amount of time after March 2023.

With these shops closing down, there are multiple things to consider before the inevitable e-pocalypse. First, not only should you download any available updates for your current game library, you should also download any updates for any games you're planning to buy in the future. Next, remember that many games have copious amounts of DLC (some free, some paid) that will be unavailable to purchase after the Final Day. The Virtual Console also comes to an end at that point, and free-to-start games, demos and paid themes will also cease to be. Wii U and 3DS exclusive games also become unavailable!

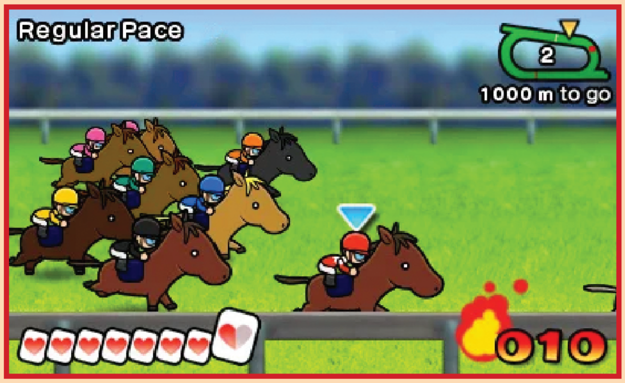
Until this End of eDays, we're going to highlight some of the best each eShop has to offer through our next few issues. Starting with sports picks! **– THOR**

RUSTY'S REAL DEAL BASEBALL

NINTENDO'S NUMBER ONE divorced doggy daddy is about to be homeless! After the 3DS eShop closes up, Rusty Slugger and his litter of rebellious pups won't have any other place to go.

With its 3DS-specific features and a unique take on microtransactions, it's unlikely this one will be ported to the Switch any time soon, so this may be your last chance to take a swing at one of the Big N's most experimental titles. More so, after getting the base game, you need to keep playing if you want to get the in-game "haggle items" you need to get the rest of the package at a decent price. So if you haven't gotten the nose hair trimmers and shovel yet, you haven't got much time! When the 3DS eShop is taken offline, Rusty's shop goes out of business too! **– JONATHAN**

APRIL 2014



POCKET CARD JOCKEY

NO ONE IS better at combining virtual pet rearing, breeding and competition with video game logic than Game Freak. They used this formula to create a little franchise called Pokémon, and the rest is history!

Pocket Card Jockey, also from Game Freak, follows the same recipe, but all the ingredients are swapped out. Instead of virtual monsters you have chibi ponies, and the turn-based fighting contests have been replaced with races that are won by . . . playing Solitaire extremely quickly!? I never would have guessed that this would be one of my all-time favorite 3DS games, but I actually wore out my original handheld's touchscreen from playing it so much!

This one also uses 3DS-centric features, like stylus rubs for speed boosts and dual-screen dynamics that fill your top display with fillies while you draw courses for your horses on the bottom. A quick Switch port is unlikely, so let the game-freaky foals ride while they still can! **– JONATHAN**

MAY 2016

NINTENDO POCKET FOOTBALL CLUB

FOR THE MOST part, these days, the games Nintendo releases are the same all around the world. But because soccer is not nearly as popular in America as it is elsewhere, Japan and Europe got to enjoy this simulation without us.

Nintendo Pocket Football Club is not a typical soccer game focused on direct control of players on the pitch, but rather a management sim that casts you as the decision maker running the team behind the scenes. You choose players to hire and players to fire, direct their training to strengthen their skills and make the call on what tactics they'll employ in games — but once an actual game begins, it's a hands-off affair where you just sit back and watch your A.I. squad doing their best without any immediate input. A fascinating release with a ton of depth, and it's sad American fans never got a chance to try it out! **— LUCAS**

APRIL 2014

INAZUMA ELEVEN

SPEAKING OF COUNTRIES where soccer is more popular than here in the United States, Japan had a surge of support for the sport beginning in 2008 when Level-5 first released this game on the DS. A fully story-driven JRPG masquerading as a soccer game, Inazuma Eleven chronicled the trials and tribulations of the Raimon Junior High Soccer Club, a group of young players who are hopelessly out of practice and only get their acts in gear when a promising new player transfers to their school.

This was a fascinating release that was so well received in Japan that it inspired a whole lineage of sequels, multiple anime and manga series and even four full movies! But here in the States we've never gotten official localizations for anything other than this first game in the saga (which itself took six years to launch in our region, becoming a 3DS eShop exclusive instead of a retail DS cartridge). We'll likely never get more, so grab this one at least! **— LUCAS**

FEBRUARY 2014

NES REMIX 1 & 2

IF YOUR FAVORITE part of the WarioWare games tends to be the 9-Volt or 18-Volt levels, then this pair of games is right up your alley. They take classic Nintendo-made NES games and put different spins on them. Various challenges increasing in difficulty are presented from several games, and are typically time-based. The faster you complete a challenge, the more hearts you get. And the more hearts you get, the more NES games you unlock!

The whole thing plays heavily on nostalgia, even presenting each game in an old-school CRT TV screen in the menu. The Remix modes are the best, where Link can tackle Donkey Kong's first level, Toad can beat Octoroks, you can compete against Wario in Dr. Mario and have Samus beat World 1-1 in Super Mario Bros. Everyone wishes the focus was more on these mash-ups and that there were a lot more of them, but without them we may never have had all the little bonuses in Super Mario Maker! This is also the place to play Super Luigi Bros., which is basically a Super Mario Bros. mirror mode! **— BRETT**

DECEMBER 2013 & APRIL 2014

Wii SPORTS CLUB

NINTENDO'S FIRST ATTEMPT to carry the Wii Sports audience into a new hardware generation, Wii Sports Club is basically an HD remaster of the original game from 2006. It's got a couple of added features — like the ability to use the Wii U GamePad as a tee in Golf and new skill shot games in Bowling — but this is effectively just Wii Sports again, which presents some issues in terms of value. The price is a bit steep at about $40 for all five events, but each event can be purchased individually, so if you have no interest in Boxing, for example, you just saved yourself some cash.

Wii Sports was a cultural icon, and while the brand-new Switch Sports game looks great, it has a very different personality. So if you want to play Wii Sports in its original form, Club is arguably the best way to do that. It looks great, it plays great and it has some clever GamePad features that currently can't be experienced anywhere but Wii U. Most of its online features sadly aren't available anymore, but this is still Wii Sports, and it's still a ball. **— KRIS**

JULY 2014

Beware the Spidersaurs!

WayForward brings new run-and-gun action to the Switch.

WHEN A GROWING global population threatens to drive civilization to the point of starvation, scientists step in with bioengineered salvation: merging the DNA of dinosaurs and spiders to create tasty new animals to eat, with eight meaty drumsticks apiece! Unfortunately, the newly created Spidersaurs don't take too kindly to being served up for dinner, and they break free of the laboratory to turn the tables and start chowing down on humans instead!

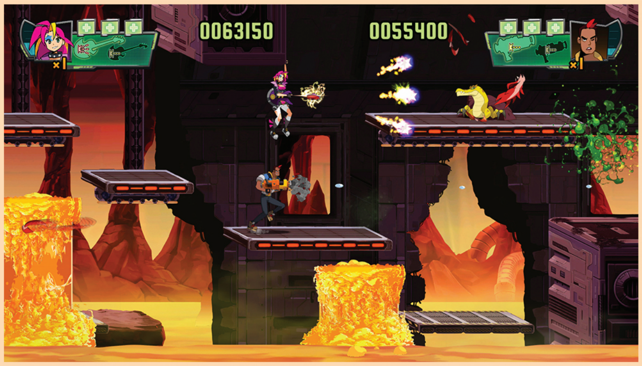
Spidersaurs is a new run-and-gun game hitting the Switch eShop soon, and it's coming to us courtesy of many of the same creative minds who were responsible for Contra 4 back in the DS days. Understandably, then, all the hallmarks of classic Contra are here again – somersaulting through the air, blasting everything in sight and grabbing occasional weapon upgrades along the way to power up your infinite ammuntion.

Keeping things on theme for this issue, one of the two heroes, Adrian, attacks these Jurassic arachnids with an unstoppable salvo of sports balls! His basic blaster is a baseball-slinging bazooka, and when he grabs power-ups it's like he's been given a shopping spree at a sporting goods store, because his gun then starts firing off things like exploding footballs. The other protagonist, Victoria, prefers to roast her foes with the power of rock 'n roll: She shreds on her electric guitar so fiercely that enemies get shredded to pieces!

Weapon upgrades are swappable – you can hold two different types at a time and switch back and forth at will. They're also stackable – if you grab more than one of the same kind of power-up, your blasts will be boosted even further!

Adrian and Victoria can also boost their own bodies' abilities by finding and eating DNA-enhancing meat. That's how you'll unlock such classic video game movement techniques as wall climbing and double jumping.

Spidersaurs was originally an Apple Arcade game that debuted on mobile devices back in 2019, and at the time it was met with a lukewarm reception. That's not too surprising, since run-and-gun games aren't exactly best played by using a touchscreen! With traditional button controls, rebalanced difficulty, new endgame content and more bells and whistles now in place, this Saturday morning-styled spiritual successor to Contra should make a bigger splash on Switch. **— LUCAS**



Time to Spin Once Again

Sonic Origins revisits the Hedgehog's past in a new way.

"WHERE'S THE SEQUEL to Sonic Mania?" That's been a common question for the past few years, as that incredibly well-received 2017 adventure managed at long last to recapture the magic of the earliest Sonic sidescrollers, so fans were left wanting more. Well, we're finally getting a follow-up: Sonic Origins!

This isn't Mania 2, but rather a collection of ports of the first four Sonic games from the early '90s: Sonic the Hedgehog, Sonic the Hedgehog 2, Sonic CD and Sonic 3 & Knuckles. What does make this a Mania follow-up, though, is that these old Sonic games are all getting totally spruced up by the same creative team that made Mania from scratch.

Christian "Taxman" Whitehead is the leader of the team, and his brilliant work overhauling Sonic 1, 2 and CD a decade ago is what originally earned him the job of leading development of Mania. Those great old ports he did so long ago have mostly remained trapped on mobile devices, though, so Sonic Origins is us finally getting the chance to play those versions on consoles with real controllers. Plus Sonic 3 & Knuckles never got the Taxman treatment way back when, so that one's going to feel totally fresh in this package!

So what's the difference, anyway? Well, in their original forms these Sonic games were in 4:3 and had old-school lives systems with Game Over screens. In their new forms, they've been given full widescreen displays and unlimited lives! That's just a much nicer way to play these classics. (Though you'll have the option to play the old versions in Origins too.) Make your choice on June 23! **— LUCAS**

Attack of the Throwback Racetracks

MARIO KART 8 DELUXE: BOOSTER COURSE PASS – WAVE 1

THE MACHINE OF Mario Kart 8 cannot be stopped. This 2014 Wii U release was extended with extra tracks later that year, then again in 2015. Then it got more content injected into it for its Deluxe edition on Switch in 2017, and now here we are in 2022 at the beginning of yet another round of additions to that same base game – a round of additions that's been promised to extend into 2023. Mario Kart 8 is almost going to be a full decade old and still getting new content! What an insane success this sequel has been.

Today, our task is to evaluate the first of six separate waves of eight tracks apiece, all of which will ultimately add up to a full set of 48 new tracks collectively being called the Booster Course Pass. It's on sale for $24.99 as a standalone download, or it's free in the NSO Expansion Pack.

The "newness" of these tracks is a point of contention, though, as all of them are revamps of past courses seen in older Mario Kart games – and some have seemingly been lifted straight from Mario Kart Tour, the mobile game that's still actively getting new content (and characters) itself. The usual crowd of angry Nintendo nerds on social media have been rabble-rousing on this point in particular, as they've attacked these tracks as being "low effort" and not measuring up in graphical detail to the main game's courses.

. . . *Maybe* they've got a point? But when you're posting side-by-side comparisons to Twitter that zoom in with 300% magnification to some bush in the background and pointing out its relative lack of detail like it's some kind of "AHA!" gotcha moment proving that Nintendo's full of lazy developers, I'm just going to shake my head at you. These tracks all look fine. Stop wasting your life.

Wave 1 of the Booster Course Pass includes two cups: Golden Dash and Lucky Cat. Each of those holds four tracks each.

Golden Dash starts in France! It presents Paris Promenade, a track from Tour that has you racing city streets around (and under) the Eiffel Tower. It's a fun one that uniquely changes the track layout for each lap – on the final lap you end up racing back toward any racers who are lagging behind, as it doubles back on itself! Similarly, Lucky Cat's first race takes place in Tokyo on a track that also changes from lap to lap and lets you catch a glimpse of several of that city's most famous landmarks.

Other tracks are more traditional, like the straightforward Toad Circuit returning from Mario Kart 7 or Mario Kart DS' Shroom Ridge. The oldest of the bunch is Choco Mountain, pulled out of 1997's Mario Kart 64 and given a robust revamp that includes a new cave section and a flying leap.

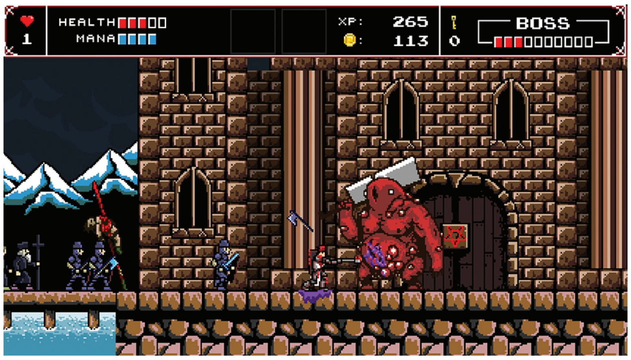
Sky Garden, back from the GBA Kart sequel, has earned complaints for not being enough of a match to its original track layout, and I admit that is odd. Part of the nostalgia for these tracks is their specific sets of twists and turns, right? Not just their settings and music? Other alterations are more minor, like the fact that the cars in fan-favorite Coconut Mall no longer move as you head to the finish line. And they're driven by Shy Guys instead of Mii characters.

Universal praise has at least been lavished on the grand finale of this set of eight, though: Ninja Hideaway, which is essentially a brand-new course full of wild shortcuts through a grand Japanese estate. It's great!

All in all, there may be some call for a bit of complaint here, but not much. The promise of 48 new tracks for $24.99 works out math-wise to just 52 cents per track, and I just can't see how anyone could argue the value of that! **– LUCAS**

DLC PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E

9.0



More Gore to Abhor or Adore

INFERNAX

AT FIRST GLANCE, Infernax is an overly violent riff on Castlevania II: Simon's Quest – but it's so much more than that. In actuality, Infernax is an overly violent love letter to the entire NES era of gaming, with a ton of great stuff bubbling just under the surface!

The Simon's Quest connection is its most obvious, as the game's world is unabashedly stylized after that classically obtuse NES adventure. Everything from the stage layouts to some of the enemy designs, even the day/night cycle, are ripped directly out of Castlevania II. Almost immediately, however, you're presented with one of Infernax's most interesting diversions from its source material: A man stands before you asking you to kill him, because he's turning into a monster.

You're given the choice to either help him or end him. This kicks off a string of decisions that constitute the game's morality system. These decisions have actual repercussions on how you can progress throughout the adventure, and whether or not you can earn the "best" ending. The choices aren't always easy to make, either! For example, that first guy asks you to help him by killing him, so which choice in that instance is actually the morally "correct" one? You'll have to decide.

What makes these choices easier is the fact that the game encourages multiple playthroughs by being mercifully short. It even has a number of accessibility options and difficulty levels to help you get through your quest, but much like the NES games it pulls its inspirations from, no matter how you approach things, Infernax is brutally difficult. Your character is more nimble than Simon Belmont, but the overall challenge is more akin to Ghosts 'n Goblins or Ninja Gaiden, with some areas providing a near-constant onslaught of potential one-hit kills at every turn.

However – and I'll avoid details in the interest of not spoiling anything – a little more than halfway through your adventure you're presented with an option to theoretically remove the difficulty entirely, or fundamentally alter the way the game is played in multiple spectacular fashions. This is both entirely optional and requires some light internet research to take full advantage of, but it's also tied directly to one of the game's most brilliant features: an overflowing amount of references to the NES.

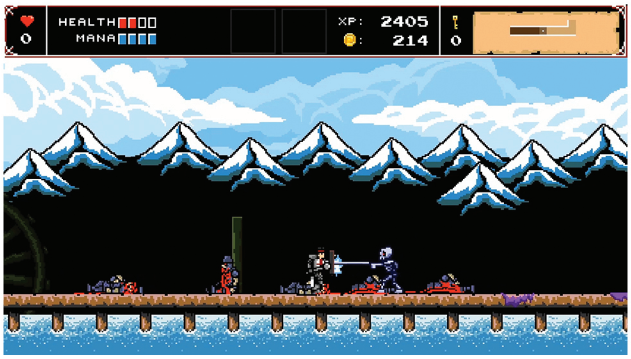
If you're the type of person who would recognize the password screen of a Game Genie, you will absolutely get more out of your time with Infernax than someone who doesn't. Sleep at an inn for three consecutive day/night cycles or kneel by a familiar-looking cliff for 10 seconds and you'll be treated to works of brilliance tailored specifically to fans of Nintendo's 8-bit machine. Enter the Konami Code at the title screen and . . . well, I wouldn't dare spoil that surprise.

Infernax was clearly made with a tremendous amount of love for the gaming history that inspired it. The only thing holding it back is the fact that the core gameplay itself isn't spectacular. It isn't bad by any stretch, but by the end I was only really compelled to stick around to see what was going to happen next, not because I was having so much fun playing.

Still, if you love NES games and can handle a LOT of gore (seriously, it's rated M for a reason), Infernax is an unforgettable nostalgic experience. **– KRIS**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: THE ARCADE CREW
DEVELOPER: BERZERK STUDIO
RATING: M



6.5

Death is Not the End

GETSUFUMADEN: UNDYING MOON

OF KONAMI'S RECENT developments, greenlighting a sequel to the 1987 Japan-exclusive GetsuFumaDen easily ranks among the most surprising. The Famicom original was an action-adventure that alternated between overhead and sidescrolling segments, not unlike the first TMNT NES game. For this revival, however, Konami opted to join the steadily expanding 2D roguelike scene.

Undying Moon employs an ukiyo-e art style to realize the Japanese underworld. Rather than the fire-and-brimstone interpretation from Western literature, here is a corrupted reflection of the mortal plane, dotted by violent coastlines and misty mountains and populated by an ensemble of disturbing yokai. The soundtrack, too, earns high marks for its contemporary spin on Japanese folk music, leading with distorted shakuhachi flutes and shamisen strings before slapping you with wild metal riffs. The sensory stimulation alone is incentive enough to dive ever deeper into the abyss!

Regarding its more substantive attributes, Undying Moon doesn't do anything that other roguelikes haven't already done. Essentially it's Dead Cells, only slower and boasting fewer tools. As Fuma of the Getsu Clan, you navigate a procedurally generated environment, farming enemies for money and resources, while upgrading your weapons or swapping them for better ones. And though initially you lose all your spoils should you die, you can buff Fuma with permanent upgrades such as increased health, better weapon spawns and even retention of some materials upon subsequent deaths.

Fuma's main armory consists of blades, clubs, whips and so on, with the likes of bombs and rifles relegated to sub-weapon status. So while you do possess some degree of long-range capability, combat is primarily a close-quarters affair. Watch enemy patterns, dodge roll through their attacks then strike when their guard drops – you know, the usual routine of observation and timing common in retro-inspired fare.

Along the way, you'll encounter several screen-filling bosses who threaten to end your run – yet these foes are more forgiving than you'd expect. You're given enough breathing room to gauge their abilities before launching an offensive – I myself was able to trounce a handful of these big baddies on my first try! Such balanced difficulty goes far in driving player motivation, though no one will chastise you for quitting while you're ahead and returning to your home estate post-boss with all the treasures you've obtained.

Unfortunately, it's these very treasures that hinder progression. Permanent buffs, weapon forging, weapon improvements – everything is so *expensive!* I've clocked a hefty chunk of hours, yet only successfully forged one flippin' umbrella! And sure, I boosted my base strength and potion inventory slightly, but that still leaves several dozen skills out of reach. Thus it's imperative to scour the map for treasure exhaustively, with the slimmest promise of gains.

GetsuFumaDen: Undying Moon may be pretty to look at and enjoyable enough to play, but the snail's pace of its upgrade system flies counter to the appeal of roguelikes. Without more streamlined growth and acquisition, the incentive to dive back in for another run takes a massive hit. Barring a balance update, it'll remain a textbook case of "slow close, yet so far." **– TONY**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: KONAMI DEVELOPERS: KONAMI & GURUGURU RATING: M

Return to a Parallel World

CHRONO CROSS: THE RADICAL DREAMERS EDITION

CHRONO TRIGGER WAS such a stunning success that it demanded a sequel – but Chrono Cross arrived with a powerful individual presence that made it feel like it stood alone. It was similar to Trigger in a handful of ways, but starkly dissimilar to it in others. It was like a game that came from some alternate world!

And that's precisely the focus of this adventure. Whereas Chrono Trigger was a time-traveling quest across multiple eras of history, Cross is a dimension-hopping journey that explores the differences between parallel worlds. The protagonist, Serge, lives an idyllic life in a humble fishing village until he one day falls into a rift taking him to a parallel reality: one where the village still exists, but where the Serge of that world actually died as a child. Kind of trippy to visit your own grave!

From that promising story hook, Chrono Cross presents an epic tale full of mystery, grand battles and tons of different recruitable party members. It was a hit when it first debuted on the original PlayStation nearly 22 years ago, and it's great to finally be able to play it again on a more modern platform.

. . . Well, it's *mostly* great.

This is a poor port. It's choppy, running at a lower framerate than it did even running on the PlayStation decades ago (according to Digital Foundry), and I honestly don't know how they managed to achieve that. Its dated, confusing menu system has been left intact when it could have desperately used an overhaul in readability and usability. The background art of each and every scene has been filtered through an automatic upscaler that just muddies them all. It's really unfortunate how flat this presentation falls.

And yet, there are several positive points to take into account as well! A handy fast-forward feature is now built into the adventure to help streamline some of the slog of going through repeated battles. There are several display options, including a "New" graphics mode that improves the old PS1 character models and profile art in dialogue boxes.

It's clear some effort was made here – it's just not every decision was the right one, and the Square Enix tech team in command couldn't overcome whatever the obstacles were that kept them from hitting a better framerate.

What's worse, Chrono Cross is a difficult game to return to in 2022. The tons of recruitable characters I mentioned? Really, there are way too many. Chrono Trigger told a focused story with a maximum of seven party members – Cross has *45* possible team members. It's ridiculous. Yes, that variety encourages multiple playthroughs, but I doubt anyone will want to slog through this story over and over again just for the chance to *really* focus on Poshul. The magic and stamina systems also feel archaic now, and, again, the clunky menus don't help there.

Let's end with two absolute wins, though: the sensational soundtrack and the inclusion of a brand-new localization of Radical Dreamers!

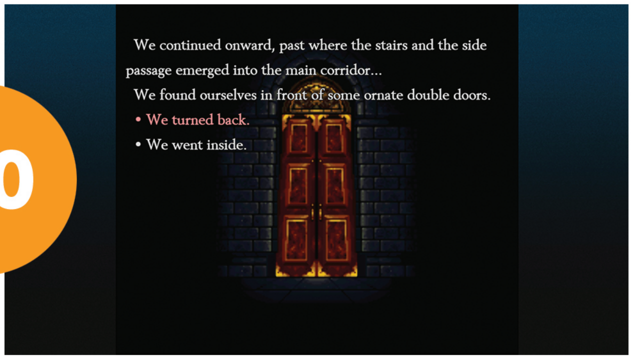
Chrono Cross, for all its issues, is honestly worth playing for its music alone. This game boasts one of the greatest OSTs in video game history, and I implore everyone to at least give it a thorough listen online.

Radical Dreamers is a "lost in untranslation" semi-sequel in this series that was kind of the first pass at the story that was later used for Chrono Cross. It's a playable visual novel, telling a linear tale up until you arrive at "choose your own adventure" decision points. Then you pick your path and pray it's right!

Ultimately, I'm equally delighted and disappointed. Maybe there's a better version of this game available in another world? **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RATING: T

7.0



When It All Comes Tumbling Down

WHERE CARDS FALL

NORMALLY I CRINGE when narratives are added to puzzle games. This game feels like the reverse, where a narrative decided to add a puzzle element!

A series of vignettes showing the interplaying relationships between what I assumed to be teens is broken up by a puzzle game in which you manipulate card stacks to build platforms for your character to traverse. The vignettes do not have dialogue, but rather a language full of grunts and noises reminiscent of Zelda games. This lets the viewer interpret what transpires in each vignette to a point, but it's mostly obvious what is happening.

The presentation is beautiful and smooth, but the game progresses slowly. The connection between the cards and the narrative only makes sense after playing most of the game, and even then it's thin. The vignettes should feel like a small reward for completing each level, but instead I found myself wanting to skip them, which the game does not allow. Rather than letting players interact with the scenes, it's just sitting, waiting and then trying to decipher what the developers wanted to portray in each scene.

This thematic gap and the fact that some vignettes are pointless led to less investment in the characters. Trying to graft emotions onto avatars with very little expression by simply adding grunts, simple animations or long pauses can be done, but it's a big ask for the viewer. This is especially exacerbated by the isometric angle not allowing us to see some expressions and the characters being so small on the screen that it's tough to see them emote even when they are facing the camera. Design choices stymy this portion of the game, and when it's half the game, that's a huge problem.

After leaving a house of cards, it flattens so you can use it to make platforms to reach a door to a new house. Several different card stacks are introduced slowly and make different "buildings" that you must place strategically. Triangle cards make a barn. Cards with three squares make a tower. Et cetera.

You can also spread the cards out to make bigger and more detailed buildings, which is crucial for getting height. Your character has very little agility and can only jump small gaps and climb up certain things.

Other elements also come into play, as certain surfaces can't be walked on, wind can wreck your plans and clouds can disrupt your foundations. It's unique and enjoyable, but also feels challenging and fresh. I wish they had skipped the janky narrative and focused on making more of these casual puzzle levels.

After an hour of play, I had to find the origins of the game because it felt like it would be more suitable for my phone. Sure enough, the game started as an Apple Arcade game for iOS devices, but learning that made me more confused, as the Switch version does not feature touch control.

It could really benefit from it as well, as the controls take some effort to work out. It may not be the controls directly, but rather the subtle feedback the game gives you to show you which deck of cards you're controlling. This likely makes more sense when your fingers are on the card stack.

Where Cards Fall is short, lasting only a handful of hours before completion. There aren't any collectables to grab, bonuses to obtain or extra vignettes to experience. It's a linear artsy story experience with interactive puzzle segments that I simply can't justify telling fellow gamers to throw a Jackson down to experience. Feel free to discard any plans to play this one and move on. **— BRETT**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SNOWMAN
DEVELOPER: THE GAME BAND
RATING: E10+

6.5

7.5

Retro Dino Puzzle Fun

DUMPY & BUMPY

BACK IN OUR 42nd issue, we interviewed a game developer who goes by the name of Programancer. It was our Halloween special, so we wanted to shine a spotlight on his work-in-progress, the Castlevania-inspired "The Transylvania Adventure of Simon Quest." Two and a half years later that game remains just a work-in-progress, but while we're waiting for it to be finished, there is another Programancer creation available to play now in the Switch eShop.

If "Simon Quest" is his take on the Castlevania series, then Dumpy & Bumpy is Programancer taking on the likes of The Adventures of Lolo. This is a screen-by-screen puzzler in which, one stage at a time, you're challenged to solve some kind of perplexing problem involving block pushing – or block biting.

The titular pair of heroes are a couple of chomp-happy dinosaurs who both come equipped with the smile of a crocodile – and the same mouth full of sharp teeth. Early levels implore you to employ those extra incisors to bite several blocks out of existence. Easily done. But then things start to get tricky.

New levels arrive in which you're not allowed to bite – doing so fails the stage instantly, forcing a restart. You instead have to guide sliding enemies around the screen and trick them into breaking blocks on your behalf. Or you may have to slide blocks into specific marked positions – dealing with their troublesome ice physics along the way. Or you might have to manage a screen full of bombs, or a whole mess of teleporters. Most often it's insane combinations of all of the above! The complexity ramps up quickly.

A little too quickly, honestly. I'm no stranger to puzzle games of this nature, but I found myself staring down true stumpers in just the second and third worlds of Dumpy & Bumpy. Some of these screens are so overstuffed with different elements that they'll surely strain the processing power of your brain.

And often even when you've worked out what moves you need to make, levels can still seem unsolvable due to the exacting degree of precision they demand in your movements.

The sliding enemies are so fast and so intrusive that they sometimes seem truly impossible to avoid, and that can be frustrating to deal with.

Dumpy & Bumpy does support two-player co-op, but I don't know if it's helpful to have someone else taking up space in these cramped stages or not. Most of the time I think Player 2 would just be another obstacle to have to avoid. I will say that I appreciate the inclusion, though, because I happened to overhear my sons playing this as a pair while I was in another room, and they were rolling with laughter at how terribly they were failing. A video game that's still fun even when you aren't winning? Programancer can be proud of that! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SCREENWAVE MEDIA DEVELOPER: PROGRAMANCER RATING: T

Take the Razor Wheel for a Spin!

GUNVOLT CHRONICLES: LUMINOUS AVENGER IX 2

AS SEQUELS GO, this is a bit of a strange one.

To sum it up succinctly, Gunvolt Chronicles: Luminous Avenger iX 2 is the sequel to a spin-off that takes place in an alternate universe, and it seems to have ties to another Inti Creates series. I don't just mean the guest character DLC they're fond of, either, but this game seemingly actually *canonizes* one of them. It's almost like how Disney's Marvel Cinematic Universe, Sony's Spider-Man movies and Sony's Spider-Man movie spin-offs (that aren't actually related to those Spider-Man movies) all work together somehow. It's wild.

In terms of gameplay, Inti hails this as "the new apeX of 2D action" on their website, but I'm not so sure I agree. Following the original iX title, iX 2 feels more like a step back — or at best, a lateral move. That isn't to decry it as a bad game, however. Far from it. It just makes some moves to differentiate itself from its predecessor, and I don't think they all quite stick their landings.

Put simply, iX 2 feels less kinetic than the original. The general feel of the hero, Copen, is the same, but the awesome movement mechanics that defined the original have largely been scaled back this time around.

Whereas before Copen could dash three times in the air to tag enemies before unleashing a volley of homing shots, now he can dash . . . once. Then he has to recharge by touching the ground, and there's no double-tap down on the D-Pad to get you there quickly, so you're left waiting for the jump jets to slowly deliver you to terra firma, or disabling them to get there only a little faster. You can unlock his "original" moveset of three dashes later on, but even then you still have to deal with the slower recharge issue.

While Copen's aerial maneuvering has been downgraded, he does have a new trick up his sleeve with a new weapon, the Razor Wheel. Instead of firing lasers at tagged foes as before, now he'll fire energy buzzsaws. But that's not all: When on the ground, he performs a Zero-ish combo with a melee form of the weapon, ending on a giant energy buzzsaw that can be upgraded to launch as a projectile at the end of said combo.

The levels and bosses manage to be extremely hard, yet very cheese-able. There are some enemies here that will rip you to shreds, but at the same time, you have Lola on hand to restore all your health at any time with little penalty. The game is largely as hard as you want to make it, though there is also a story-driven Hard Mode to amp things up later, too.

The differences from the original game put me off a bit initially, but the more I played, the more I grew to like what this sequel does. Luminous Avenger iX 2 may not be the new apeX of 2D action, but it's still worth a look if this kind of game interests you. — **DAVID**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES RATING: T

Take a Walk Around the Block

PIKMIN BLOOM

WHEN I HEARD there was an augmented reality game like Pokémon GO, but with Pikmin instead, I was intrigued. Once I downloaded it and fired it up, though, I was almost instantly confused.

I was expecting something different from Pikmin Bloom. What I got was a walking game! First, you link your game to Google Fit to get your step count. You also get a seed right away, and then you plant that seed in a planter. While you walk around, the seed sprouts and grows based on your steps, and once you've reached the required amount of steps, it becomes a Pikmin you can pluck.

Once plucked, Pikmin can be fed nectar to grow their flower. Nectar is obtained by sending Pikmin out to find fruit. A radar item can help find fruit and other items. Different fruits yield different colors of nectar, and once it's fed to Pikmin it produces flowers to pluck.

Flowers can then be activated by touching the flower jar and, as you walk, the game plants AR flowers. At the end of the day, you can see where you've been – your flower trail – and even tell the Pikmin what sort of day you've had. Flower planting also speeds seed growth, creating the game's cycle.

While I expected some rarer flowers to promote growth faster, it seems like they're all the same. Feeding the Pikmin nectar also raises their hearts, which represents favoritism or morale. Hearts are also improved through challenges and retrieving items. Eventually each Pikmin will go on a solo mission, retrieving a gift that contains a sticker or something for them to wear. In general, much of the game is experimentation and plenty of it is left unexplained. This could be by design, but parts of the game aren't obvious, and functionality can be lost simply because it's either presented in a blast of info at the start or lost in menus.

Once you've built a small Pikmin army and gained some levels, you can send Pikmin out on challenges. I expected to see wandering Bulborbs, Wollywogs and Blowhogs. Instead, your Pikmin attack . . . mushrooms. Small, medium and large mushrooms can appear in any of the colors of your Pikmin, suggesting that certain mushrooms are weak toward coordinated Pikmin. Whether or not your Pikmin has more hearts and bloomed flowers may matter more, but there's no guide and the game doesn't tell you if this is the case either. You get random fruits from destroying a mushroom, but it also nets you a postcard from a real-world landmark nearest to where the mushroom was found. These postcards can be sent to friends that you can gain by sharing your code online.

All of this is fun, but once you play and have 300 Pikmin, you hit a paywall. The game won't let you pluck new Pikmin until you've released some old ones – or expanded the amount you can hold by paying for that privilege.

Pikmin coins are given to you at an estimated rate of around 500 flowers planted equaling one coin. Most of the things in the shop are laughably pointless. The game gives you bonuses for many of your levels (I got to Level 39), like extra planters, seeds and even special nectar. All of these things are very expensive in the shop, but the worst issue is you can't spend Pikmin coins on expansions – those require real money. All expansions, whether item storage or Pikmin expansion, cost $2, and they only expand your capacity by a small amount. Paying $2 to add 50 more Pikmin is ludicrous. This is where I stopped playing. If I can play for a few months for free, why would paying $2 only net me a few more weeks of play at best?

The game has done some community events, added memento cards for when you break 10,000 steps in a single day and other incremental things to attempt to get me re-engaged, but it really turned me off by not allowing me to use my hard-earned coins on adding Pikmin. It's a burst of fun that quickly gets marred by paywall greed. **– BRETT**

7.0

MOBILE PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NIANTIC
RATING: E

BY THOR THORVALDSON

THE Sport REPORT

Playing video games may seem like an opposite extreme from playing sports, but what happens when athletic achievement and electronic entertainment join forces? As Nintendo sends both Nintendo Switch Sports and Mario Strikers: Battle League to store shelves, let's do a full assessment on how they've handled sports games as a whole over the decades!

FROM REALISTIC SIMS to goofy battlefields stuffed with power-ups and special shots – and even team management games – Nintendo's covered a lot of ground with their soccer video games. I guess this is one sport that lends itself well to several different interpretations!

Soccer

LET'S KICK OFF this collection of sports histories by spotlighting the sport whose history is being extended twice more as this issue heads out the door: Both Nintendo Switch Sports and Mario Strikers: Battle League are adding to an already long legacy of soccer getting adapted into video game form.

Rewinding back in time to Nintendo's first effort in this arena, we arrive at the simply titled "Soccer" that launched on the Famicom in April 1985, then made its way to the NES in America and Europe a couple years later. A black box game, it was a fair initial attempt at simulating the soccer experience, but fell short due to the limited tech at the time – the NES couldn't handle full teams, so each side only got five players on the field at once (plus a goalkeeper). That same limitation also afflicted the more robust Nintendo World Cup they published a few years later – that one was more fun and fully-featured, though, as it had four-player support! (It was also the only time Nintendo localized a Kunio-kun game as a first-party release!)

Game Boy scored its own version of Nintendo World Cup alongside a few other adaptations, but of course those were even more limited than what we'd seen on NES. The next leap forward happened on SNES, as Nintendo's Super Soccer tapped into 16-bit power to both boost the number of men on the field and present a dramatic new Mode 7-powered viewing angle that had you charging up the field instead of going from left to right.

Nintendo hung up their cleats in the N64 era, passing soccer game publishing off to third parties like EA, who introduced the long-running FIFA series to the Big N's fans beginning in 1997. Unfortunately, their early efforts reviewed poorly – FIFA took a while to find its footing. By the time it did and its simulations could be taken more seriously, Nintendo was getting back into the game themselves with the over-the-top action of the first Super Mario Strikers! It arrived on the GameCube in 2005 and cast realism aside in favor of fun, wild shots and exaggerated characters.

Nintendo deciding to make any sport into a "Mario sport" is always a big deal in the video game industry, and sure enough, soccer games of all stripes have become more frequent and more varied ever since that first Strikers struck. It got a sequel just two years later, Mario Strikers Charged, that found an expanded audience due to being published on the much more popular Wii console – as well as the fact that the first Wii Sports game didn't include a Soccer mode, so Charged made a strong case for itself as supplementary software. The FIFA series has continued presenting annual sequels ever since the N64 era, and while they're not always critically lauded, their consistency should be applauded. As soccer has captured more of the imagination of Japan's talented artists, we've seen the rise of transmedia properties like Inazuma Eleven and Captain Tsubasa – existing as anime, manga, video games and more, all at the same time.

Mario, meanwhile, has kept putting in work on the pitch himself, with the Soccer mode in Mario Sports Superstars in 2017 and the Tokyo 2020 Olympics game being two of his latest appearances there. Those were surely just warm-ups for the big event of Mario Strikers: Battle League, of course!

While initially held back by limited tech, soccer games now are only restricted by the creativity of their creators. Who knows where they'll go next! **– LUCAS**

Tennis

THE HISTORY OF tennis video games stretches back to the very beginnings of video games as a whole – because the very first video game was a tennis game!

Way back in 1958, a physicist named William Higinbotham wanted to create an entertaining exhibit for visitors coming to tour the Brookhaven National Laboratory. Using one of the oldest computers ever made and an oscilloscope for a display, he created Tennis for Two, a two-player tennis simulation that had competitors bounce a ball back and forth over a net, on a court seen from a side view. The exhibit became wildly popular – a portent of the worldwide popularity video games would go on to enjoy decades later!

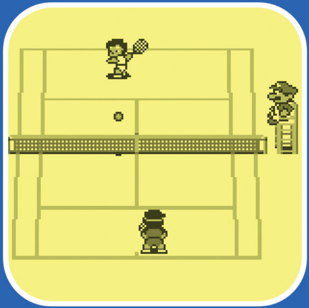
Tennis continued to be turned to for inspiration as video games developed as an entertainment medium. The next notable release was the legendary Pong! One of the earliest video games to be housed in an arcade cabinet, Pong first appeared in 1972 and its take on tennis (or table tennis, to be a bit more precise) took the world by storm! Players spent hours upon hours (and tons of pocket change) on the game, which had two opponents directing paddles up and down on the two sides of the screen, trying to bounce a constantly moving ball past the opposing paddle's defenses.

And this is where Nintendo came in. Years before the Big N became known as a true innovator in the video game industry, they broke into the business largely by working as copycats! Seeing how popular Pong had become, Nintendo licensed the rights to make their own version of it from Magnavox, then created "Color TV-Game 6" for the Japanese market. The first-ever Nintendo home game console, the TV-Game 6 contained six different versions of Pong and sold over 1,000,000 units – as did its pricier counterpart, Color TV-Game 15, which launched soon afterward and held even more Pong variants within it.

The next step in Nintendo's tennis video game evolution I'd trace to Snoopy Tennis, a Game & Watch unit they published in 1982. It eliminated the abstractions of Pong by replacing the rectangular paddles with images of Peanuts characters like Snoopy and Charlie Brown visibly holding actual tennis rackets. The gameplay remained similar enough, though – moving up and down on one side of the screen to intercept incoming tennis balls and bounce them back the other way.

Real tennis simulation, then, can likely be traced to the 8-bit title simply called Tennis. First appearing on the Famicom in Japan in early 1984 and later helping to launch the NES in America in 1985, Tennis was an admirably accurate first take on rendering the real-world sport as a video game. The court was visibly angled on the screen in order to help players judge depth for their shots, and the ball would shrink and grow in size as it flew farther away from players, then got returned back over the net, and so on. Full player movement was included. Varying shot types like lobs, volleys, forehands and backhands were available. And Tennis even marked Mario's first cameo appearance as the chair umpire taking in all the action next to the court!

Following Tennis serving a supporting role for the NES launch, Nintendo began to make sure tennis titles were there to boost other system launches as well. Game Boy got its own version right when it debuted;



THERE'S SOMETHING SO intrinsically simple about the sport of tennis that has made it the perfect match for video games for literally 64 years at this point! The constant back-and-forth between opponents just translates so well, especially when two players can play!

WHETHER PLAYING ALONE, with a friend as a partner or with a friend as an opponent (or both!), tennis is fun in every possible configuration. With both Mario Tennis Aces and Nintendo Switch Sports now on sale, it's the perfect time for you to get into the swing of things!

the Super Nintendo served up Super Tennis almost immediately after its launch. But the biggest push for Day 1 tennis gaming came in 1995, when Nintendo decided to make Mario's Tennis the free pack-in game included with every new Virtual Boy!

It was the perfect showcase for the new 3D visual technology the Virtual Boy was built around – with their faces pressed into the VB headset, players were transported into a red-and-black tennis match where the ball being lobbed back and forth really appeared to be traveling further away from their eyes, then coming in closer again. Not a lot of people ended up playing Mario's Tennis due to the failure of Virtual Boy as a platform – it lasted only about a year on the market – but it was Mario's first step onto the court (after years of watching from the sidelines), and it was the beginning of a whole new Mario sports series.

Mario Tennis on the Nintendo 64 came next, making the most important contribution to the video game industry that any Nintendo sports game ever has: the introduction of Waluigi! He was invented when the developers needed a doubles partner for Wario, and no previously existing Mario series character seemed to be right for the job. (For what it's worth, I wouldn't want to be paired up with a sweaty Wario while playing a sport either.)

Every character got a natural doubles teammate because of the game's emphasis on multiplayer play: The Nintendo 64 had four controller ports built in for the first time in the Big N's hardware history, and having four players pair up and go against each other in two-on-two doubles matches was one of the most fun local multiplayer experiences to be found in that whole generation. It helped that Mario Tennis had great controls and true depth to how it handled every variety of shot. An absolute high point in Nintendo tennis history, and one you can play via the NSO N64 app today!

The N64 Mario Tennis experience was extended when a Game Boy Color game of the same name launched a few months later. Using the Transfer Pak, characters could be moved back and forth between the two systems. (Maybe we'll get that feature restored if Game Boy games finally make it to the NSO service as well!) And the portable game exclusively had an RPG story mode, as the developers at Camelot tapped back into their role-playing roots.

Around this same time, Sega was finding a place in the tennis space with their Virtua Tennis series. It became the leading brand to focus on realism and real pro athletes like Venus and Serena Williams, Maria Sharapova and Roger Federer. As Sega phased out of the hardware business, a few Virtua Tennis titles ended up on Nintendo systems like the GBA and Wii.

Meanwhile, Nintendo kept trucking with Mario Tennis sequels. There have been eight total at this point, with the most recent being Mario Tennis Aces on the Switch. Not all have been winners – Ultra Smash on Wii U felt particularly unfinished – but it's undoubtedly proven to be one of Nintendo's most consistent sports series.

Finally, we have to acknowledge the motion control revolution! The Tennis event in Wii Sports, perhaps more than any other piece of that package, did a lot of heavy lifting to sell the global audience on what the Wii could do – physically moving your arm and pretending that the Wii Remote in your hand was a tennis racket just made sense to players' brains. It's no wonder it went on to be such a massive hit!

And it's no wonder why Nintendo Switch Sports has not only brought back tennis, but also added the similar badminton to the mix as well. Nintendo has learned over several decades now (even looking all the way back to the '50s!) that video game players just love to make-believe that they are racket-swinging champions.

Maybe that's why part of the tennis scoring system is called "Love?" – **LUCAS**

Football

WHEN PEOPLE THINK about American football and Nintendo, most will jump straight to Tecmo Bowl and Tecmo Super Bowl on the NES. While both are arguably the best that system had to offer, Nintendo actually developed some football games for the NES and SNES that turned some heads!

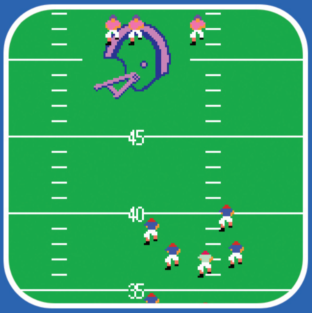
The first of these football games to have Nintendo ties was 10-Yard Fight. Made by a scrappy little arcade game developer named Irem, the game appeared in arcades in 1983. The late Gunpei Yokoi, genius designer and engineer for Nintendo, was a producer responsible for the port to the Famicom. In 1985, the port appeared as a launch title for the NES. While some were marveling at Mario, others were witnessing the most faithful recreation of American football for home screens the market had ever seen! While the arcade game featured only offensive play, the NES port added defense too. The game wasn't particularly innovative outside of its graphical prowess at the time.

NES Play Action Football was a title developed by TOSE (which is essentially a second-party developer for Nintendo), and it released in 1990. The game featured eight city teams (avoiding NFL licensing) and was played in an isometric view, setting the game apart from competitors visually. Nester, the Nintendo Power mascot, was even an announcer! The game is most known for being one of the few four-player titles available to play with the NES Four Score and Satellite accessories. Having four controllable players on the field with so many other moving objects on the screen pushed the NES to its limits. It also pushed audio limits, having several voiced sound effects for major game moments like touchdowns and first downs. The game did not run as fast as Tecmo Bowl, however, and with football being an intense action game, most players opted for speed over the bells and whistles. A year after NES Play Action Football, Tecmo Super Bowl would intercept all other players on the field with winning gameplay and the well-known insurmountable stats of Bo Jackson.

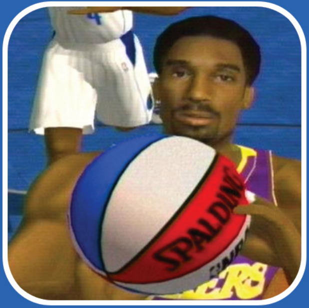
TOSE would try again on the SNES with Super Play Action Football in 1992. It was essentially a graphical overhaul of the NES version using the SNES processor to achieve some more speed, but the action is zoomed in more than on the NES, meaning the game was basically a sea of green grass and hash marks – and was generally unstimulating. Madden '93 releasing in the same year meant it had little room to perform, and there's a reason that Madden became the de facto name synonymous with football video games going forward. For Nintendo Easter eggs, Nester lost his job as announcer, but Mario did appear on the coin for the coin toss.

Nintendo then largely left the development of football games to third-party developers, and those developers chose systems that could run the games faster in the post-SNES eras. I remember the NFL Blitz series running pretty well on Nintendo 64, but the Madden games were always mocked on the Nintendo systems for being the worst option graphically and technically.

Sadly, Mario & Friends have not tackled this particular sport. The closest they came is Rugby Sevens in Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, but some may see that as a sacrilegious statement, as the games are basically only similar visually. Seems a missed opportunity with Chargin' Chuck running around! **— BRETT**



A MARIO FOOTBALL game was in the works at one point, early in the GameCube era. It didn't make much progress before being retooled to become a realistic sim with NFL teams – but that version, too, got canned when its devs at Retro Studios pivoted to Metroid Prime!



FOR A TIME it seemed like Nintendo had more faith in the game of basketball, as it was clear they intended for the NBA Courtside series to become an annual staple. Once Kobe passed the ball to Mario, though, the mustachioed main mascot never passed it back. (What a ball hog!)

Basketball

IT'S TIME TO slam, and welcome to the jam? Maybe not in Japan. Basketball has never been big there. Maybe that's why Nintendo has yet to fully embrace it the way they have with soccer or golf? But when they do have hoop dreams, they dream big.

Back in the NES days, Nintendo passed on making any basketball titles at all, so third parties had to fill in the gap. First up was Double Dribble from Konami. Released in 1986, it was an early hit on the system, but with wholly fictional teams like the Boston Frogs and the Los Angeles Breakers, it lacked authenticity. Then came Arch Rivals, Midway's punchy "basketbrawl" take on the 2-on-2 game, and Jordan vs. Bird, a 1-on-1 half-court matchup that used star power to compensate for its limited scope.

There were also a few "by-the-book" basketball titles on the NES, like 1989's All-Pro Basketball from Vic Tokai and Hoops by Jaleco, but they didn't exactly turn heads. In fact, from 1995 until today, all Nintendo home systems have seen their fair share of "NBA + Year"-named basketball sims, but they're only for fans of the actual sport. History has shown that dropping celebrity players into weird situations has much more mainstream appeal.

That's exactly what Midway and Acclaim did with 1993's NBA Jam, and it was massively successful. It took the rebellious spirit of Arch Rivals, added digitized versions of famous players, then gave them 20-foot dunks and balls burning with . . . athletic excitement? It didn't make sense, and it didn't have to. NBA Jam quickly eclipsed more conservative SNES games of the era like Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basketball (which wasn't even that conservative! Everyone is wearing robot armor?!) and Barkley Shut Up and Jam! (which later inspired a free cult-classic indie RPG).

Most people just didn't care about basketball video games where all you did was play basketball. They'd rather see their NBA heroes get wild in cartoonish power fantasies. In 1994, Shaq beat up muscular mummies and unsuspecting lion ladies in Shaq-Fu, all while Michael Jordan used fire- and ice-powered b-balls to blast apart shuffling zombies and giant disembodied eyes in Chaos in the Windy City. These increasingly unreal adventures led up to Space Jam in 1996. After that, the relationship between normality and basketball was severed forever, at least as far as popular video games were concerned.

When Nintendo finally got to the sport themselves, they tried the star power approach for a while with Kobe Bryant headlining four games across the N64, GBC and Cube. But they must have realized realism wasn't what video ballers wanted any more, so they then pivoted to taking Space Jam's crown as the king of unlikely crossovers. In 2005, Mario, Luigi and Peach invaded the real world of the GameCube's NBA Street V3 with pick-up games against LeBron James, Wilt Chamberlain and . . . the Beastie Boys?! Then the very next year, Nintendo published Mario Hoops 3-on-3 for the DS, a battle of buckets that mixed the Mushroom Kingdom with the world of Final Fantasy! If there was any way to get Japanese players to care about basketball, that must have been it.

But it wasn't that popular! And so, Nintendo tapered down their attempts to slam and/or jam. Their final forays in the realm of roundball came in 2009's Wii Sports Resort, 2010's Mario Sports Mix for Wii (another Final Fantasy crossover!) and Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games on 3DS. **— JONATHAN**

Golf

IF I WERE to rank all of these different sports according to their overall importance to Nintendo over the years, I would have to award the top spot to the game of golf. Time and time again, the Big N has gone back to the greens for inspiration, and every single home console and handheld system the company has ever put out has hosted at least one first-party golf game. It'd be a close battle with tennis, but I'd argue that more than any other sport, golf has been Nintendo's go-to game.

The long relationship began in the early '80s with an absolute avalanche of golf games programmed by none other than the legendary Satoru Iwata. Mr. Iwata first put his skills to use in making Golf for Famicom – but that game was done so well that it then became the basis for arcade versions called Stroke and Match Golf and Vs. Golf. Later, it was revised again to feature a female main character, and that version was sold as Vs. Ladies Golf. The game made the leap to the United States as part of the NES launch lineup in October 1985, then it got two sequels exclusive to Japan: Golf: Japan Course and Golf: U.S. Course. It was a whole lot of golf, and a whole lot of work for Mr. Iwata, I'm sure!

What made that whole collection of golf games so successful was how well the sport was adapted. Golf is incredibly complex to play in real life, as you need a whole bag full of different clubs to use. There's distance to consider before every swing, and terrain to take into account too: Are you teeing off? Hitting from the fairway? Stuck in a sand trap? Then there's the wind strength and direction, whether you want to try to hook the ball to the left or slice it to the right . . .

Somehow, in his first try, Mr. Iwata was able to craft a program that addressed every one of those elements. The game distilled golf down to its essentials, with a visual representation of where your golfer was standing on the course, a wind meter and distance to the pin measurement up above and a simple club selector. Then, when it was finally time to swing, it was a matter of three button presses: one to start the swing, a second to set its power and a third to set its accuracy, all determined by the timing of a small arrow moving along a meter on the screen.

This design was so foundational back in 1984 that it still, to this day, is the basis on which most golf video games are built. That same setup was reused once more on NES for the first-party NES Open Tournament Golf, and of course third parties came out swinging with their own versions, some of which were headlined by pros like Jack Nicklaus and Lee Trevino.

Fairly early on in video game history, then, developers began to look at golf as a game that could be abstracted and made into the backbone of different kinds of game designs. Nintendo helped blaze this trail as well with Kirby's Dream Course, an SNES adventure in which Kirby himself became the golf ball and players had to putt him toward a goal hole in a series of increasingly obstacle-packed levels. Today we have games like What the Golf?, the silly parody in which the golfer slings himself toward the hole instead of the ball; Golf Club: Wasteland, where golf is used as a framing device to tell a cautionary tale about climate change and the corrupting power of wealth; and the upcoming Cursed to Golf, a fusion of golf with sidescrolling platforming and puzzle-solving. Though we must also credit Itchy & Scratchy in Miniature Golf Madness for its inspiration!

THE INFLUENCE OF Nintendo has shaped the video game industry more than any other company, but the golf games they've produced and published over the decades have to be given special recognition. So many great golf games can trace their D.N.A. back to the Big N!

FOR ANYONE OUT there who's not a sports fan at all and has maybe never played any kind of sports video games, a recommendation: Give a good golf game a shot. The Mario Golf series in particular is so fun and addictive that I just know you'd have a good time!

As we've already noted with other sports at this point, the point at which golf became a "Mario sport" was pivotal. Though it's kind of hard to define exactly when that was! NES Open Tournament Golf had been called Mario Open Golf in Japan, so you could start there. But Mario was clearly the golfer in Golf: U.S. Course and Golf: Japan Course too, so you could start there! Even the original Golf game's player character looked an awful lot like our favorite red-hatted hero . . . but he's officially been recognized as a different guy named Ossan at this point, so we'll let him have his own mustache in peace.

So perhaps it's better to say that Mario Golf on the Nintendo 64 was the pivotal release (whether it's the "first" Mario Golf or not). It brilliantly brought back the timed button presses as the foundation of the design, but pushed the presentation to the next level with fully 3D courses and a cast of Mushroom Kingdom stars. Like Mario Tennis from that same era, Mario Golf also got a Game Boy Color counterpart that connected to it and also contained a standalone RPG — it was a phenomenal game, and such an influential one that we got the wonderful indie adventure Golf Story just a few years ago thanks to its enduring inspiration. (And its sequel, Sports Story, is still on the way in the future!)

Something we haven't mentioned yet in this issue that we should is how Nintendo made a big push for sports games on the N64 with a special logo on the box for their "N Sports" line. The Kobe Bryant basketball games were part of the push, as were the N64 Ken Griffey titles. Probably the oddest inclusion, though, was Waialae Country Club: True Golf Classics, a serious golf sim that stood in stark contrast to Mario Golf's general wackiness. It's recently emerged back from the shadows of the past to gain a cult following as a speedrun game!

Also stepping into the spotlight in the late '90s was a young man by the name of Tiger Woods! Golf's biggest breakout star by far, Tiger unsurprisingly headlined a ton of different golf sims, many of which found their way to Nintendo's hardware. (He was such a big name that one of his games didn't even bother to use the word "golf" — it was just called CyberTiger!) Nintendo never attached any athlete's name to any of their golf games, though. For them, Mario was a good enough name to convince people to hit the links!

When Wii Sports arrived on the scene in 2006, Nintendo revolutionized video game golf once again! Full motion control meant that players could grip the Remote, pretend it was a club and swing away to drive the ball off the tee. (And more than a few Wii owners managed to send their "club" right through their TV screen by forgetting to use the wrist strap!)

Perhaps the general public had learned that lesson well enough by the time Wii Sports Club arrived on Wii U, as Nintendo took the bold risk of adding a second screen to that already fraught situation! While lining up your shot with the Wii Remote in your hand, you could also place the Wii U GamePad on the floor in front of you to get a close-up view of the ball projected right at your feet. Impractical? Maybe! But it made for a good clip for Nintendo to use in their trailers showing off what the Wii U could do.

These days, as with other sports, golf has settled into parallel legacies. Realistic sims have the PGA Tour series, most recently seen on Switch in 2020, and the adaptations that prioritize whimsy have Mario Golf, most recently seen on Switch just last year, with Super Rush. That game seems to have gotten a negative reception from lots of players on social media, but I personally loved its innovations, like XC Golf and the Speed Golf mode that has you running to catch up to your ball on foot after a shot. Creativity like that shows me that even though golf video games have been around for over 40 years, we'll still be seeing fresh ideas in them for decades more! **— LUCAS**

Boxing

IN THE EARLY ’80s, Muhammad Ali and Rocky Balboa were two of the most famous names in the world, adored by people of all ages. It makes sense, then, that the early ’80s were when Nintendo went all-in with boxing games. The original Punch-Out!!, an arcade title released in 1984, quickly became the most profitable game of the year. With its wire-framed, Stallone-esque lead, a "colorful" cast of semi-offensive stereotypes (each with their own special moves), a dual-screen display and easy-to-understand combat system (punch, block, duck and dodge!), it suckered in on-lookers and kept returning players "hooked."

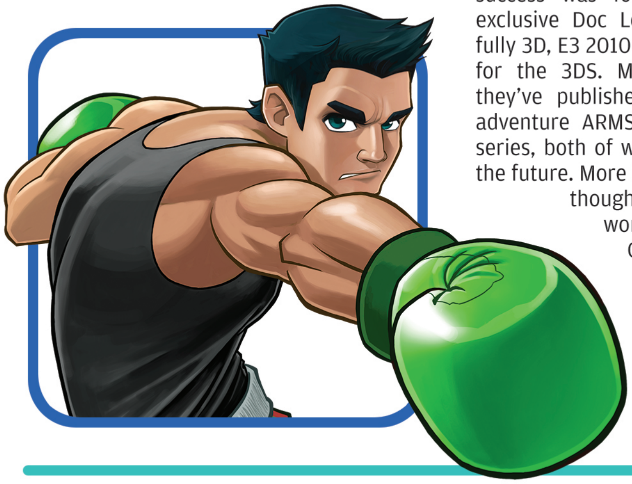
A couple of months after Punch-Out!! hit arcades, Nintendo released a Game & Watch handheld in Japan called Boxing. In the Americas, it was called Punch-Out!!, presumably to capitalize on the arcade title’s popularity. With its side-view display, black-and-white graphics and lack of distinguishable characters, it wasn’t a breakout hit like its coin-op predecessor, but it didn’t do poorly enough to tank the franchise either. Within the next 12 months, Nintendo would put a direct sequel (Super Punch-Out!!) and a spin-off (Arm Wrestling) to the original in arcades, all while planning the best way to bring the series to home consoles.

Mike Tyson’s Punch-Out!! was released for the NES in 1987. It combined fictional cultural caricatures like Soda Popinski and unreal teleporting pugilists like Great Tiger with the real-life heavyweight champion of the world! That might seem strange now, but for kids in the ’80s who looked up to Super Mario and Iron Mike in equal measure, it was a match made in heaven. The game sold over 2,000,000 copies, firmly trouncing 8-bit competitors like Data East’s Ring King and Konami’s Exciting Boxing (a Japan exclusive with a silly inflatable fighter for a controller peripheral!).

Those massive sales justified a re-release without Tyson in 1990 and cemented Punch-Out!! as the defining game in the genre. Nintendo then released Super Punch-Out!! for the SNES in 1994 and Teleroboxer for the Virtual Boy in 1995, and those were the last boxing games they’d publish for 15 years! Instead, they’d spend those years focusing their fisticuff fascinations on the sidescrolling Smash Bros. series, which invited Punch-Out!!’s Little Mac to the fray in 2014. Midway helped fill the void during the Punch-Out!!-free era with the Ready 2 Rumble series on the N64 and Wii, which ran from 1999 to 2009. It featured fights against Bill and Hillary Clinton, Shaquille O’Neil and even Michael Jackson!

After the Boxing event in 2006’s Wii Sports became a global phenomenon, Nintendo came back to the ring with an all-new Punch-Out!! for Wii in 2009. Its success was followed by the WiiWare-exclusive Doc Louis’s Punch-Out!! and a fully 3D, E3 2010-only demo of Punch-Out!! for the 3DS. More recently for Switch, they’ve published the superhero boxing adventure ARMS and the Fitness Boxing series, both of which could see sequels in the future. More immediate rumors have it, though, that Nintendo could be working on another Punch-Out!! sequel with the now fully owned Next Level Games team. Perhaps Little Mac will be punching in again soon enough . . .

– JONATHAN



THE SPORT OF boxing has fueled some of Nintendo’s most memorable and creative game designs ever! From the pattern recognition of Punch-Out!! to the motion-controlled punches of Wii Sports Boxing, this is one sport that has never failed to make a real impact. K.O.!

IF YOU WANT to go further into the past than Ice Hockey, Nintendo actually made a Game & Watch unit called Donkey Kong Hockey in 1984! It had a unique design with two small attached controllers for two players to use in going head-to-head as both D.K. and Mario!

Hockey

WE'VE SEEN SO far how Nintendo has laced up for quite a few national pastimes across their history. But what about hockey, the beloved export from our neighbors to the north? Most hockey titles that have made it to Nintendo's platforms have come out of more licensed affairs, from the groundbreaking voice samples of Konami's Blades of Steel, to an entire Zamboni-load of licensed NHL games, all the way to Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey, the icy-hot answer to arcade behemoth NBA Jam.

So what exactly did Nintendo bring to their own arena? Way back in the ancient year of 1988, Nintendo put out their own ice hockey game on the NES, cleverly named Ice Hockey, as was the style of the time. Like many other Nintendo-made sports games, Ice Hockey, at first glance, seems deceptively simple – you select a country to rep from among the United States, Canada, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia and Sweden (replaced by Japan on the Famicom), then assemble your team of four players.

Choose wisely, though! It's your choice of normal, slim or chubby players that determines your speed and power on the ice. It's all about strategy and fundamentals, after all. Hit start and it's time to play ball . . . er, puck!

Backed by some surprisingly catchy music, Ice Hockey takes a moment to warm up, but once it clicks, it really manages to stick to you like a tongue on an icy pole! The simple two-button controls create a parlor game that's easy to pick up and spend hours with, mastering the perfect slapshot – and if you're feeling more ignoble, you can always start a fight with another player by mashing wildly. Just make sure you don't get hit with any penalties from the ref!

Ice Hockey absolutely embodied the spirit of Nintendo's toy-maker origins by taking what could've been a fully straightforward simulation and adding a playfully minimalist spirit with cute sprites and addictingly accessible gameplay. Stick it through with a full game and you'll even be treated to an adorable halftime Zamboni show. But don't just take our word for it – you can find Ice Hockey on the Nintendo Switch Online app, and it's worth throwing on with some friends and a frosty maple-flavored drink sometime!

There have been dozens of licensed hockey games since, all across Nintendo's entire history, mostly from Konami and Electronic Arts, the two publishers with many of the official rights to leagues and players locked down tight. Nintendo themselves would make two more forays into hockey by adding Mario to the equation.

First in 2010, hockey appeared as one of the activities featured in Mario Sports Mix, the expanded spiritual successor to Mario Hoops 3-on-3 that let you play hockey on the lava-drenched shores of Bowser's Castle. Then Mario-style hockey happened again in Mario & Sonic at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games – though in that game the presentation is decidedly more realistic, with just a few optional arcade-style twists to spice up the matches.

Hockey might not be the global phenomenon that baseball or soccer are, but seeing Nintendo's spin on it is still quite a rare sight. Ice Hockey holds up as a console favorite for many retro gamers to this day. You'd be quite surprised how the hours melt away when you hit the 8-bit ice with a friend (or rival)! **– JOHN-CHARLES**

Baseball

NINTENDO MAY HAVE flirted with many sports over the years, but its relationship with baseball has by far been the most intimate. What greater proof of commitment is there than buying an entire Major League Baseball team? Yeah! Remember when that happened?

Let's wind the clock back to 1967, long before the house of then-President Hiroshi Yamauchi stepped into the video game ring. The Kyoto-based toy manufacturer released Ultra Machine, a pitching machine that became the company's second million-selling toy. Its popularity was enough to prompt a release on our shores under the name Slugger Mate, while also leaving enough of an imprint on Nintendo history to make cameos decades later in the WarioWare and Animal Crossing series.

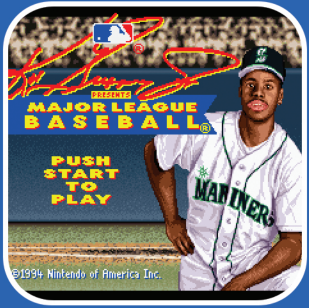
Ultra Machine's success could be attributed in large part to Japan's love of baseball – Shigeru Miyamoto even personally desired for a baseball game to appear early in Famicom's life! The succinctly titled Baseball was the platform's first athletic conversion, later appearing as a launch title for both the American and European NES. Together, all copies sold a whopping 3,200,000, the 8-bit console's best-selling sports adaptation just after Golf!

Other developers built upon Nintendo's bare-bones template with their own creative spins, ranging from semi-realistic sims that licensed the use of official team and player names to futuristic visions of robots duking it out for base possession. Commanding the plate was the Namco-developed R.B.I. Baseball and its Famicom progenitor Pro Yakyū: Family Stadium, which earned such praise from critics and audiences that both series would continue to grow independently in the coming decades (more on them ahead on Page 57).

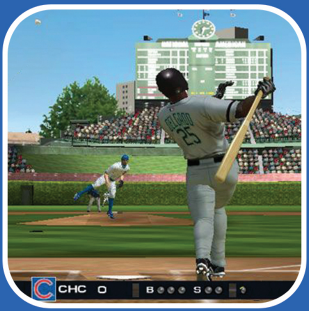
We now arrive in December 1991, months after the U.S. debut of the SNES and well after Nintendo had transformed itself from a foreign underdog to a global tech behemoth. Seattle Mariners owner Jeff Smulyan just announced that the team was up for sale following years of catastrophic losses, poor attendance and mounting debt. If no local parties were willing to foot the bill, the Mariners would be transplanted from Washington to Florida.

A Washington senator, Slade Gorton, reached out to Nintendo of America Chairman Howard Lincoln and asked if the Redmond-based company would be willing to get involved. Word climbed up the chain of command to Yamauchi in Kyoto, who wound up being more than happy to help keep the Mariners in the area. You might think this gesture was born of that Japanese affinity for baseball as previously mentioned, but in truth Yamauchi didn't care much for the sport and never wound up attending a Mariners game even once! No, this was simply an act of good will toward a state that had been so accommodating during NoA's early years.

Should this deal go through, the Mariners would become the first MLB team owned by a foreigner – a thought that didn't sit well with many of the league's bigwigs. See, Japan had experienced an economic boom during the '80s that fueled its expansion into foreign markets, and this made the American business world nervous of a Japanese cultural invasion. It took none other than the President of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush himself, to assuage worries that Nintendo was taking over baseball!



MORE THAN ANY other sport, Nintendo's history with baseball has been totally intertwined with the actual happenings in the majors. What if the Mariners had been a better team in the early '90s? Nintendo never would have bought them, and the Griffey games wouldn't exist!



FROM MLB-BRANDED SIMS to the purely casual Wii Sports experience to the Mario games that offer something of a balance between the extremes, Nintendo's offered a truly wide variety of baseball experiences over the years. It'll be fun to see their next spin on this sport!

In the end, a cluster of Seattle investors pooled together $125,000,000, with Yamauchi contributing $75,000,000 to that total in exchange for accepting a limited 49% voting interest. While this meant he held a controlling stake, it ensured that the American shareholders would have the ultimate decision-making power.

Aside from using the Mariners' stadium as an additional advertising venue, Nintendo remained mostly hands-off regarding team operations – though they were more than willing to leverage their new acquisition to boost their software catalog. While the Mariners may not have been a particularly great team – to this day, they remain the sole MLB team to never play in the World Series – they did have one key asset on their roster. Why, just some young gun named Ken Griffey Jr., a home run-leading, elite fielding, backwards cap-wearing wunderkind often hailed as the greatest baseball player of the '90s! With such star power in their pocket, Nintendo simply had to slap his handsome mug on a new line of outsourced baseball sims!

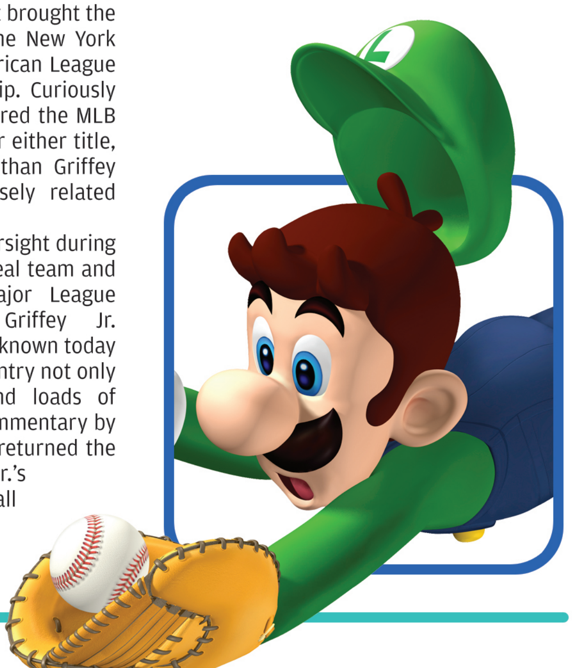
First to carry Junior's visage was 1994's Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball for SNES. Production duties were handled by Software Creations, who crafted a seminal entry in the genre beloved for its beefy yet comical graphics, stellar music and arcade-style action. Rare was then tapped for the 1996 follow-up Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run, a title inspired by the legendary double play that brought the Mariners to victory against the New York Yankees during the 1995 American League Western Division Championship. Curiously enough, Nintendo never acquired the MLB Players' Association license for either title, meaning every player other than Griffey was saddled with some loosely related pseudonym.

Nintendo corrected this oversight during the N64 era, providing both real team and player names in 1998's Major League Baseball Featuring Ken Griffey Jr. Developed by Angel Studios – known today as Rockstar San Diego – this entry not only offered intuitive controls and loads of Easter eggs, but also color commentary by Junior himself! Angel Studios returned the following year for Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest, which introduced small but crucial tweaks to their already winning formula.

Months after Slugfest's release, Griffey was traded to the Cincinnati Reds, bringing an end to his Nintendo sponsorship. Just as well, since Nintendo's quiet resolution for the new millennium was to skip the MLB licensing rodeo in favor of their own stable of colorful heroes. Thus we were gifted the 2005 party outing Mario Superstar Baseball on GameCube, followed by Mario Super Sluggers on Wii three years later.

Back in the physical world, Nintendo found new ways to entice visitors to the Mariners' Safeco Field. There was of course a team-branded DS Lite, limited to 2,000 units and only available on stadium property. Meanwhile, attendees who brought their own DS from home could connect to the Nintendo Fan Network, a smartphone app precursor that allowed users to pull up stats, catch live broadcasts or even order concessions from the comfort of their seat! The Fan Network surprisingly maintained support through 2016 . . . right around when Nintendo decided to sell most of its shares in the team, retaining only a 10% stake.

The sale of the Mariners happened to coincide with the Big N's waning interest in the sport. Though baseball has appeared in a number of Nintendo-published minigame compilations since 2008, the only dedicated title during the interim has been Rusty's Real Deal Baseball. Perhaps the denizens of the Mushroom Kingdom will be allowed one more day on the diamond in the future! **– TONY**



Skiing & Snowboarding

SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING may not be the first sports that come to mind when you think of Nintendo, but they actually have some pretty significant history together, dating all the way back to their early arcade days. In the mid-'80s, Nintendo introduced what they called their Vs. System, which was basically an NES in an arcade cabinet that allowed owners to simply swap out boards and artwork instead of having to purchase entirely new machines to replace games that had stopped making money. The line was a moderate success, but one skiing game in particular, called Vs. Slalom, stood out because of an optional attachment that allowed players to control the game via a pair of skis that they could physically stand on!

It was the NES version, though, that became more historically significant thanks to a number of important milestones. Arguably the most iconic video game packaging design of all time is Nintendo's "black box" line. When Vs. Slalom made its way home to the NES (as just "Slalom"), it was the very last game to be released in the classic "black box" style. What's more, Slalom was both the first NES game developed by a Western studio and the first Nintendo-published game developed by the now-legendary company Rare. (It also featured the most detailed depiction of the human butt seen on the NES to that point, a truly noteworthy accomplishment indeed.)

Next came Tommy Moe's Winter Extreme: Skiing & Snowboarding for SNES, which actually wasn't made by Nintendo at all. They did, however, heavily feature it as part of their edgy "Play It Loud!" ad campaign intended to combat Sega's meteoric rise in popularity. It was a great choice, too, because it looked awesome in motion, and the extreme sports angle lent Nintendo an air of cool they were desperate for during the 16-bit console wars.

Nintendo later put their own stamp on the genre with the immensely popular 1080° Snowboarding for N64. Like Winter Extreme, 1080° was a visual stunner in its day, standing out among competing snowboarding games like Sony's Cool Boarders and Atlus' cult favorite Snowboard Kids. It was successful enough to earn a followup on GameCube in the form of 1080° Avalanche, but unfortunately, that was also the last game in the series.

Nintendo hasn't produced a standalone skiing or snowboarding game since, though they haven't ignored the genre entirely. The Mario & Sonic Winter Olympic games and the Wii Fit series both feature some fun takes on the sport, and through a partnership with Electronic Arts, the GameCube version of SSX: On Tour included playable Mario characters, while the Wii later got its own exclusive entry called SSX Blur. Plus, thanks to the Wii Balance Board, Ubisoft's Shaun White series found success on the platform resulting in another exclusive, Shaun White Snowboarding: World Stage.

These games were mostly great, but let's hope Nintendo finds their way back to the slopes one of these days for a proper snowboarding sequel. 1080° in 1080p? Yes, please! **— KRIS**

IT'S BEEN NEARLY 20 years since Nintendo's last first-party adaptation of snowboarding, but there's always hope for more in the future. When 1080° for N64 is ultimately added to the NSO Expansion Pack, be sure you fire it up a time or two to let them know there's still interest there!

IT MAKES SENSE that the biggest sporting event on Earth would have games headlined by two of the biggest video game stars on Earth, and despite the two most recent Winter Games not getting Mario & Sonic adaptations, this partnership should continue into the future.

Olympics

DESPITE BEING A prominent part of the announcement for the recent 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, Nintendo has strangely had a rather distant relationship with the event. In fact, while Nintendo has been involved in a number of video games both unofficially and officially based around the Olympics, it's generally been secondhand at best.

The first real instance would be World Class Track Meet, which they published in 1987 alongside the peripheral known as the Power Pad, an electronic mat that would be placed on the floor for Power Players to run and jump on to control on-screen action. Such was their confidence in the title that they even released it bundled with the NES Power Set, where it came on a 3-in-1 cartridge along with the popular Super Mario Bros. and Duck Hunt.

But with the possible exception of some rebranding aside, Nintendo had nothing to do with the development of World Class Track Meet. In a former life, the title was released briefly in the West as Bandai's Stadium Events, which used their Family Fun Fitness mat for gameplay input until Nintendo apparently cut them a check. As a result, Stadium Events is considered one of, if not *the* rarest of NES games, fetching upward of $35,100 on eBay.

And for the next 20 years, that was it. That is, until a certain former rival came a-knockin'.

Throughout the '90s, there were many famed rivalries in the mainstream media. Bulls vs. Pistons, Coke vs. Pepsi, WWF vs. WCW and, of course, Sega vs. Nintendo, championed by their iconic mascots, Sonic and Mario. It was this rivalry that, even after burying the hatchet in 2001 and Sega becoming a third-party for Nintendo platforms, saw fans want to see the two finally duke it out for real. And with Solid Snake (a third-party character from Konami) revealed early on as a fighter for Super Smash Bros. Brawl, fans made it clear who else they wanted to see compete with Nintendo's finest.

It was an obvious move. So obvious, in fact, that no one saw it coming when the announcement was made that we would be getting the matchup everyone was clamoring for. Just . . . not in the way we were expecting it.

Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games was jointly announced by the two companies in March 2007, amidst much confusion. This would only further fan the flames in favor of a Smash appearance that would ultimately come to fruition in October that same year.

But that aside, it turns out that fans were receptive to the Olympic competition as well, as the games promoted a competitive spirit fitting for the two rival factions to compete in across a variety of sporting events. The series, published by Sega in the West and Nintendo in Japan, would become a commercial success, spanning every Nintendo system from the Wii and DS on up to the current Switch release, Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, with several arcade versions on the side.

In addition to a variety of minigames based around various Olympic events, several of the releases (usually on the portable side) contain story modes featuring the only time you're likely going to see the likes of Mario and Sonic, or perhaps more notably, Eggman and Bowser, interacting in any sort of a real, official capacity.
– DAVID

And More!

"MORE!" YOU SAY? But of course! We're only too happy to oblige!

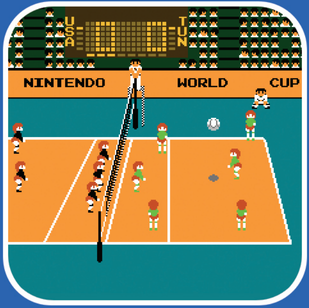
There is such a vast variety of sports on this great big Earth that consistently converting them all into video game form again and again would be an impossible task, even for the mighty Nintendo. And so it is that there are several sports that have only received a few video game adaptations over the decades, and never turned into long-running series like Mario Golf or Mario Tennis.

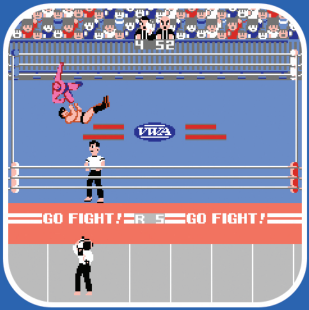
Volleyball is probably the sport that has come the closest to ranking up to the next level, but has fallen just shy. It's one of the six sports selected to star in the new Nintendo Switch Sports, of course, but before that it inspired a few earlier takes. The simply titled "Volleyball" was another of the earliest NES games, and it managed to present a full six-on-six sim of the sport in 1987 in America. (You can play it today on the NES Nintendo Switch Online app!) It was followed in the 8-bit era by Super Spike V'Ball, which Nintendo promoted heavily at one point due to its four-player mode. Four players were all you got in that game, though, as it was adapted from two-on-two beach volleyball rather than the traditional full team sport. Years later volleyball made an appearance in the Mario Party series and also Mario Sports Mix, but so far no full Mario Volleyball games have been made.

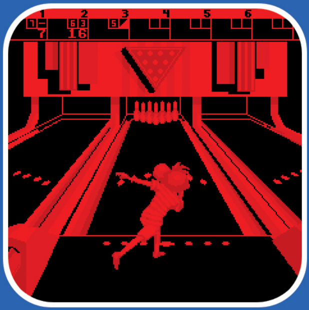
Another early NES game that seemed set up to inspire a long-running series (but never did) was Pro Wrestling. The muscle-bound madness of the WWF and WCW hit a peak of popularity in the late '80s right as Nintendo was on the rise too, and Pro Wrestling rode that wave with a fun one-on-one sim full of colorful original characters like Starman, Fighter Hayabusa and The Amazon. Unfortunately, those wrestlers have never wrestled again! (They've never even been brought back for cameos!) The wrestling genre was ceded to other companies to handle, and we've had a fairly steady march of licensed releases since.

Bowling! A handful of third-party sims like Championship Bowling and Brunswick World: Tournament of Champions launched on NES and SNES, but Nintendo didn't get into the game themselves until a legendary Nintendo Power mascot presented them a grand opportunity! Nester's Funky Bowling was developed and released for the Virtual Boy, as bowling must have been selected for its natural suitability to being viewed in 3D. The depth of the lane stretching out before players' eyes was much more immersive than anything earlier hardware could have managed! And while, again, the Virtual Boy was not a success and Nester's Funky Bowling in particular was not a strong seller even among its limited lineup, it's still fun to look back on and know it was Nintendo's first step on the journey to the mega-popular Wii Sports Bowling! Despite its massive success in that series, though, Nintendo has never spun bowling out into its own brand. No Mario Bowling, and sadly no Nester's Funky Bowling 2. Oh well!

Did you know that Nintendo published a fishing game? And that it was made by the same creator responsible for EarthBound? Shigesato Itoi's No. 1 Bass Fishing started out on the Satellaview in 1997, then got an N64 version in 2000. It never got localized for release outside Japan (depriving the Western world of another Itoi game!), but perhaps its existence influenced Nintendo's developers working on other games, since fishing minigames have popped up in Zelda and Mario games, and even the new Kirby!







THE PLIGHT OF F-Zero fans still waiting for a new sequel is a sad one, but the stalwart Pro Wrestling community suffers an even greater injustice! It's been over 35 years since its release now. Will we ever get to see King Slender and Giant Panther battle for the championship again?

WE MAY HAVE moved past the Wii phase at this point, but Nintendo's Ring-Con controller is still active and fresh. Could we potentially get a second Ring Fit Adventure game, or another sports mix that would put its unique ideas to use? I wouldn't be surprised either way!

Nintendo must have had a real "Eureka!" moment after the stunning success of Wii Sports, because their output of sports mix games sharply increased thereafter. Some sports don't make sense to market on their own – there just wouldn't be enough of an audience for a standalone canoeing or wakeboarding game. But if they tossed them in together with a bunch of others and sold them as a joint package, they could make a big splash together!

Wii Sports Resort remains the pinnacle of this practice. Launched in 2009 as the official sequel to Wii Sports, it upped that original collection's total of five events to an impressive 12! Bowling and Golf both came back from the first game, but the rest were all new arrivals, like Swordplay, Cycling and Power Cruising (riding a jetski). Each of these events was made to function with the increased motion-sensing capabilities of Nintendo's Wii MotionPlus peripheral – it was an add-on that snapped into the bottom of a standard Wii Remote and made the whole controller much more nuanced and sensitive in how it read the movements of your hands and arms.

Two events in particular really excelled in Wii Sports Resort, in my personal opinion! The first was Frisbee (a.k.a. disc golf). The MotionPlus was able to accurately register the precise angles and quick flicks of the wrist required to simulate sending a frisbee sailing through the air. I spent hours enjoying the process of practicing my disc-tossing skills and got inspired to try out the actual disc golf course that was built in a large public park near my home around the same time! (Maybe the local Parks & Rec department wanted to build it after playing Wii Sports Resort themselves?) Even better, there was a mode where you could toss a frisbee to a dog!

The other high point of Resort was its Archery event. Together with a Nunchuk, the MotionPlus-enhanced Wii Remote became a capable virtual bow that was able to fire digital arrows with incredible precision! I got hooked on playing it at the first E3 event where it was previewed, and while I don't want to brag, I'm pretty sure I was the high scorer at that expo among all who tried it out! *(I have absolutely no way of verifying that claim.)*

Does general fitness and exercise count as a sport? Apparently there is such a thing as competitive yoga, but Nintendo's Wii Fit was a little more relaxed than that.

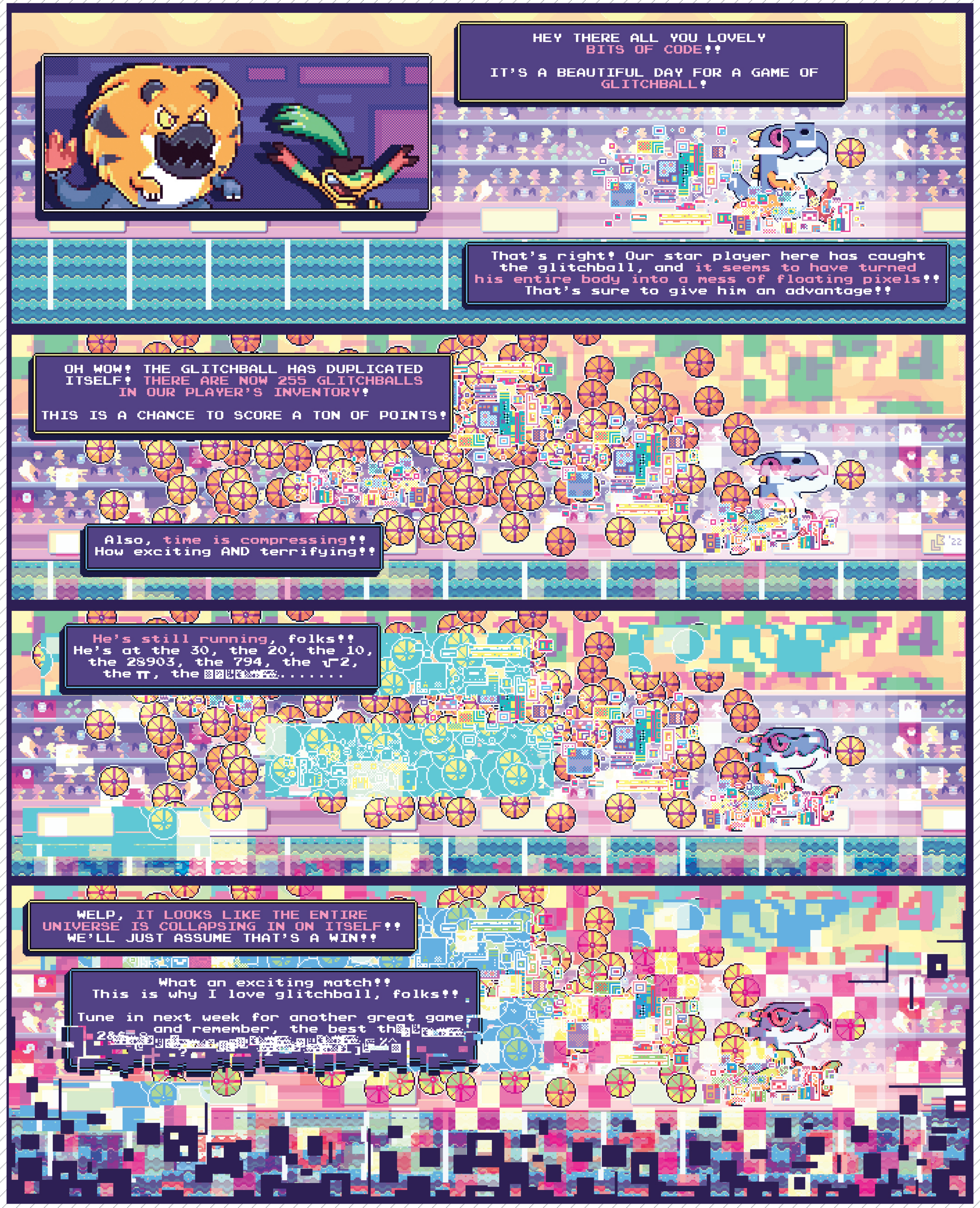
Yes, the Wii era really was the center of a sports renaissance for Nintendo. The power to take in the movement of a player's body as input just presented so many possibilities above and beyond simple button presses! The Wii Fit titles took things up yet another notch thanks to yet another new motion-sensing device, the Wii Balance Board. A platform that players stood on, it could measure how weight shifted on its surface and translate that into the shifting positions of characters on the screen. Some of the sports activities that benefited from that tech included running, ski jumping and even skateboarding! The Wii Fit Trainer even made it into Super Smash Bros. as a kind of all-around representative of all of Nintendo's sporty games.

Most recently in this area, Nintendo's introduced Switch players to Ring Fit Adventure, which might rightly be seen as a true culmination of the evolution of motion control and game design. It's a whole RPG adventure built around physically running and doing exercises like lunges and squats to attack enemies! It's a wildly unique new creation, and perhaps it represents the beginning of a new era in which Nintendo will no longer just directly adapt existing sports from the real world, but rather use the vast possibilities of video game technology to invent their own athletics entirely!

In summary, it's been incredible to watch how Nintendo's video games have related to and intertwined themselves with sports over four decades now. I think it's safe to say that we're still in the middle of this story too, and that we can reliably look forward to more decades' worth of sports games to come! **— LUCAS**

the sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s video game mascot

by LLK



BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

MARIO STRIKERS: BATTLE LEAGUE

After 15 years, the Strikers series is finally striking again!

WELL, IT'S ABOUT time!

Mario going on an extended hiatus from playing any particular sport isn't exactly anything new, as we've had to endure long droughts between sequels before. But after Super Mario Strikers dropped in 2005 and its follow-up Mario Strikers Charged went on sale in 2007, just two years apart, who would have predicted that the wait time to get to the series' third installment would be another *15 years!?*

Strikers is a series that's been long overdue for its third strike, and now it's finally set to strike the Switch on June 10. I feel like we've struck gold!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NEXT LEVEL GAMES
RELEASE: JUNE 10, 2022 RATING: E10+

NOT EXACTLY A SOCCER GAME

Strikers is Mario's soccer series – or football for its more globally accurate name (this sequel is even called Battle League Football in Europe). But the sport as it appears in this video game is so far removed from soccer/football that Nintendo is careful with their language to describe it. To quote their PR on the subject, they say:

"Introducing Strike, a five-on-five, soccer-like sport with no rules – do whatever it takes to win! Get gritty and try to score the most goals by tackling enemies, using items and pulling off score-boosting Hyper Strikes."

So this isn't soccer, but "Strike." It's soccer-esque. Soccer-adjacent.

I doubt too many people needed that clarification since no Mario sports games have ever been accused of being too similar to their real-world inspirations, but the "no rules" part of that description is important to focus some attention on. Striking isn't just what the players do in relation to the ball in this game – they strike each other even more often!

Defense gets brutal. When you're not in control of the ball and trying your best to move it down the field and score, that means you're on the attack and trying to stop the other team from scoring – by bashing them, bopping them, bowling them over and frequently flinging them straight into the electrified fence surrounding each arena! There was an old basketball game on the NES called Arch Rivals that billed itself as a "basket brawl" – it encouraged aggressive, full-contact play to the point of celebrating just punching your opponents in the face. Because no fouls were ever called! The developers at Next Level Games took inspiration from games like that when they first made the Strikers series, as this is a violent soccer spectacle where no one is ever going to get a yellow card or get ejected from a game for being too rough. You're supposed to!

Playing offense, then, means doing your best to avoid the aggression of the opposing team long enough to find time to line up a shot on goal, charge it up and launch it. And that's literal: You hold a button to charge up your shot, and if you've been properly energized by picking up an Orb before your shot attempt, a special charge meter will then appear. Correctly time a pair of button presses and you'll activate a wildly flashy powered-up shot that might fly out inside a massive fireball or spawn a tornado on the spot to sweep your opponents away.

But that's different than before.

NEWLY REVISED

Having had 15 years to reflect on which aspects of the last Strikers title could have used further refinement, the dev team at Next Level seems to have landed on several key balance changes for Battle League.

Needing to pick up a randomly spawning Orb on the field before being able to attempt a super-powered shot (now called a Hyper Strike) is new. Previously such a shot could be taken by a team captain any time they had the breathing room to try for it. But only the captain could strike the ball with such power, which meant the other three members of the team – the Sidekicks – never could.

So that's probably why Next Level has made another big change for this sequel: The Sidekicks have been side-lined! In both Super Mario Strikers and Mario Strikers Charged, you'd pick just one "major" character like Mario or Luigi or Peach to be your team captain – the other three players on your squad had to be lesser Mushroom Kingdom characters like Hammer Bros or Koopa Troopas. Here in Battle League, though, the whole Sidekick concept has been axed entirely. You now assemble your entire team by choosing from the "major characters" lineup! No longer must Mario and Luigi be eternally opposed on the pitch. Now they can work together on the same squad!

This is kind of a good thing, but also a bit of a bad one too. I doubt anyone will be too upset that they can no longer fill out their squads with three cloned Birdos like back on the GameCube. But cutting Sidekicks entirely means that the overall total of playable characters in Battle League may end up being less than what we got in Charged on Wii, 15 years ago. We'll have to wait and see on that.

One big shift in the base roster that long-time fans immediately noticed when Battle League was announced is that Daisy has apparently been given the boot! Her mannerisms and intense personality were a high point of the first two Strikers titles, so to see her getting swapped out for the more reserved and graceful Rosalina is sad and shocking.

. . . But that doesn't mean Daisy won't get to strike again on Switch. It's highly likely that Mario Strikers: Battle League has additional captains waiting to be unlocked – whether through some kind of in-game achievement or as the sort of months-later free DLC we discussed back in the Download section. I could picture Daisy being held back intentionally in order for her to make a bigger splash later, as the star of a free update set to debut at some point nearer the end of 2022. (Or maybe we'll see her in a week!)

GET EQUIPPED

Another reason Nintendo probably shouldn't worry about anyone mistak-ing Strikers for a serious soccer sim (aside from it starring a fire-breathing turtle king and a dinosaur with the tongue of a frog) is that serious soccer rarely sees its players take the field while wearing full suits of armor. That's going to be a big new feature of Battle League!

Mario Strikers Charged had these characters equipped with things like helmets and claws, but those were just cosmetic additions to their outfits that had no impact on actual gameplay. In Battle League, though, "Gear" is a major game-changer! Using in-game coins you earn over time, you can invest in four categories of Gear – Head, Arms, Body and Legs – to boost each character's abilities. All of the characters have five different ability scores: Strength, Speed, Shooting, Passing and Technique. It'll be up to you to decide whether to invest all your cash into items that power up one of these areas, or to spread the wealth around to make a more balanced suit to wear onto the field.

There's a case to be made for either approach. If you totally maxed out, say, Toad's Speed, then you could take control of him in a game and see him run circles around all his opponents. But doing nothing to power up his Shooting ability might mean that when you successfully outspeed your foes to the ball, you aren't able to accurately kick it into the goal!

The addition of Gear to the Strikers formula is also going to be a boon to multiplayer matches. You can choose to equip no Gear at all – so if you're playing a match against a friend or family member who's not as skilled as you are, you could let them wear a full suit of Gear and keep yours in storage to effectively handicap yourself.

NO HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

Imagine a baseball game between the Chicago Cubs and the Boston Red Sox. Now imagine that instead of that game taking place at either Wrigley Field or Fenway Park, both of those stadiums got chopped in half to make one new ballpark that was 50% of one and 50% of the other! Both teams would have equal claim to home field advantage, meaning also that neither of them would!

That's the wild new dynamic being introduced for the arenas we'll see in Battle League. Rather than getting entire venues that are all themed in one way or representing one player, like Bowser's Castle, we'll instead get half-and-half fields made from the fusion of two totally visually distinct pieces. Half of Luigi's Mansion meshed with half of Donkey Kong Island. One side of a field with classic Mushroom Kingdom pipes and bricks, and the other side looking like Rosalina's Comet Observatory.

That last one isn't confirmed yet, but I'd say it's a fairly safe guess since the overall arena containing these half-and-half field fusions appears to be a massive sphere floating up in outer space!

Out of all of Battle League's new features, this overhaul of the arenas has me the most excited. It'll be interesting to see if these stadium halves all have unique hazards in addition to their unique looks, too. Stage hazards were a part of nearly every arena back in Mario Strikers Charged, so it's probably a safe bet that they'll make a return for this Switch sequel. (But it would also be nice to have the option to turn them off, in case players just want to enjoy the ambience of a place like Bowser's Castle without getting burned by lava running onto the field.)

Here's hoping Waluigi has his own totally bonkers stadium too!

ACE OF CLUBS

Mario Strikers Charged was one of the flagship titles for Nintendo's online multiplayer efforts in the Wii era. (The company famously lagged behind the PlayStation and Xbox solutions for playing with friends and strangers in distant places.) Now, 15 years later, Nintendo's arguably still behind the competition in that regard, but it is a whole lot easier to get online games going in 2022 than it was in 2007.

Battle League seems to be prepped to push for one of the most robust online experiences Nintendo's ever attempted, too! Not only will you be able to play a variety of matches over the internet, but you'll also be encouraged to join a Club of up to 20 players and work to compete against other Clubs for online dominance! Nintendo has clearly seen the communities that have rallied around competitive online games like Splatoon, and organizing players into groups like this seems like a natural next step. You should feel much more inclined to improve your skills and make yourself available for more online matches if there's a crew of 19 other players out there counting on you and cheering you on!

It'll be fun to see existing groups and online communities gather their members together to form Clubs too. Maybe we should assemble a fighting force of Nintendo Force fans?

If you don't feel like investing extra effort in the online Club scene, you're of course welcome to focus your time and attention on local play. Mario Strikers: Battle League is also being set up to be a great local multiplayer experience, as it will support eight players all playing on the same Switch system! Might want to make sure you've got a big enough couch, as well as enough Joy-Cons all charged up and ready to be passed around the room.

MORE TO COME!

Mario Strikers: Battle League is surely hiding more secrets and features than we've been able to cover here. They've been keeping talk of the game pretty quiet leading up to the launch of Nintendo Switch Sports, which makes sense, since they wouldn't have wanted to shine the spotlight on this second Switch soccer experience when they wanted people to buy the Switch Sports version first. More details will surely follow after we send this issue out the door, and we'll of course have our full review of the final game ready for you to read in our next edition.

In closing, I'll put some final hopes/predictions into print to timestamp them for eternity: Birdo gets lifted out of Sidekick status like Toad, Toadette arrives as a brand-new Striker, Daisy comes back and becomes the most-played character online and Strikers 4 arrives sooner than 2037! **— LUCAS**

FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS: THREE HOPES

The Officer's Academy students will follow a new path into the future!

WHEN IT WAS first announced in February, Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes promised a different story set in the same universe as 2019's Fire Emblem: Three Houses. What wasn't revealed until months later is that this story will be seen through the perspective of a completely new protagonist!

Fire Emblem fans will trade the dark green locks and stoic personality of Byleth for Shez, a purple-haired dual-wielding protagonist who will have a bone to pick with old Byleth. Shez, who you can choose to be male or female, is a lone mercenary who clashes swords with Byleth, but is defeated. After their battle, a mysterious white-haired being, Arval, appears in Shez's mind and speaks to them much like Sothis did with Byleth in Three Houses.

While training for revenge, Shez encounters a group of Officer's Academy students in the forest, and that's how they meet Edelgard, Dimitri and Claude. Eventually, you'll have to choose between them, as Three Hopes also features multiple routes, but with different names: Scarlet Blaze, Azure Gleam and Golden Wildfire.

This shift in perspective with Shez as the protagonist and Byleth as an antagonist is huge, so let's speculate about it!

From what we know so far, this is a timeline where the Garreg Mach students don't have Byleth as their professor and meet them in a different way. Instead, the students encounter Shez, who chooses to work with one of the lords and will have a different kind of relationship with them.

Shez also has history with Byleth, which could influence how the three lords think of them when they do eventually cross paths. Some amount of time must pass while this is going on, as Edelgard, Dimitri and Claude have their pre-time skip designs from Three Houses, and then new designs in Three Hopes that portray them at an older age. Based on their new looks, I don't think it's quite five years like in Three Houses, but it does make me wonder how much time passes in Three Hopes.

While Byleth is painted as an antagonist this time (perhaps we'll see the full extent of their nickname: the Ashen Demon), I have my doubts about them being on the opposite side of our heroes for the entire game. I think at some point Those Who Slither in the Dark will appear and claim the primary villain spot due to their role in Three Houses and how they pulled strings from behind the scenes.

Three Hopes could also feature more cooperative paths for Edelgard, Dimitri and Claude. Its debut trailer hinted at this. No matter who you chose in Three Houses, there were consequences, character deaths and a major lack of compromise. My biggest hope for Three Hopes is that there is a way for them to create a better Fódlan together!

Story musings aside, Three Hopes will provide gameplay experiences like the Warriors/Musou games before it and continue the trend of slicing through hundreds of enemies at a time on the battlefield with over-the-top animations. So far, we've seen the three lords and their closest allies,

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: TEAM NINJA & OMEGA FORCE RELEASE: JUNE 24, 2022 RATING: T

LEADER OF THE GOLDEN DEER
CLAUDE

Claude, leader of the Golden Deer and heir to noble House Riegan in the Leicester Alliance, seems to take life at Garreg Mach less seriously than his fellow lords. However, beneath his easygoing exterior is a calculating mind, searching for answers. And boy, do you get them when you choose his route in Three Houses! Dimitri and Edelgard's paths center around conflict against each other, but Claude's culminates with a showdown against a different enemy and provides more background on the church and Those Who Slither in the Dark. While he ultimately chooses to leave Fódlan, Claude's influence is felt through his efforts to boost the land's relationships with neighboring nations. Perhaps Three Hopes will keep him in Fódlan this time around, giving the three lords a chance to work together to take down Those Who Slither in the Dark once and for all.

LEADER OF THE BLUE LIONS
DIMITRI

When you first meet Dimitri, prince of the Holy Kingdom of Faerghus, he's the polite and slightly awkward leader of the Blue Lions. But beneath the surface, Dimitri has an inner darkness due to the losses he experienced as a child. In Three Houses, Dimitri eventually loses the final grip on his sanity, transforming him into a ruthless, broken man. He meets a violent end if his path is not chosen. If you do pick the Blue Lions, Byleth and their allies bring him back from the brink, and he becomes a compassionate leader. He improves Fódlan by helping the disenfranchised and allowing citizens to participate in government. Three Hopes has the chance to change Dimitri's path by allowing him to work through his darkness before it festers too long. He can escape the dark path he went down for five years and see the light much sooner!

Hubert, Dedue and Hilda, in action. It's likely that other house members will be thrown into the mix. I'm hoping for Felix, Raphael and Petra, personally!

This is a big change from Three Houses' tactical combat, but some of its gameplay elements will return in Three Hopes. It will include a map where you can select missions and a hub where you can interact with characters, train with them to access new classes and pair them up in battle via adjutants.

It'll be interesting to see how these two types of gameplay mesh together. A good recent example to look to is 2021's Persona 5 Strikers. It had fast-paced action combat, but players could also pause and activate turn-based abilities. It would be great to see Three Hopes feature this concept, where you could stop time and unleash a specific Combat Art or Gambit, for example.

How will this game and new protagonist Shez impact the Three Houses world as we know it? With the chance for different endings for Byleth, Edelgard, Dimitri and Claude, and a new hero to get to know, I'm confident in saying that it's something fans have hoped for since we first started our journeys in Fódlan nearly three years ago. – **MAGGIE**

LEADER OF THE BLACK EAGLES
EDELGARD

As house leader of the Black Eagles and heir to the Adrestian Empire, Edelgard's first impression in Three Houses exudes confidence and poise. But like both of the other house leaders, she's got her own share of secrets. Tortured as a child by Those Who Slither in the Dark for the sake of crests, Edelgard comes to hate everything the Church of Seiros and crests stand for. She plans to reform Fódlan society by any means necessary. As Byleth, you can choose to aid her or not, and she only succeeds if you do. As leader of Fódlan, Edelgard strikes down the land's nobility and decrees that people's worth will be based on merit. Three Hopes' storyline could prove to Edelgard that she doesn't have to choose such an unrelenting (and violent) path for reform, and that it's possible to build a better civilization alongside all of her peers at Garreg Mach.

INSTANT SPORTS ALL-STARS

Wii's legacy.

IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE to overstate the impact of Wii Sports. That simple collection of five different motion-controlled sporting events that shipped for free inside the box of new Wii consoles forced the game industry to respond with sheer numbers: Nearly 83,000,000 copies of the game landed in homes around the world before the Wii era was all said and done, and nearly every game developer on the planet wanted to attract that insanely massive audience and entice them to make *their* game be their next purchase. How? Well, by making a lot more games that looked and played a lot like Wii Sports.

Hundreds of other sports compilations and casual-appeal party games flooded the market – Wii titles ended up being sold everywhere from grocery lanes to dollar stores. Bargain bins overflowed with every conceivable game idea, from "2 for 1 Power Pack: Winter Blast/Summer Sports" to "Kidz Sports: Ice Hockey." They were everywhere!

And they haven't entirely died out, either! For the last few years, the Instant Sports brand has kept this piece of the Wii's legacy alive by presenting low-budget, low-cost sports games for the Switch. None of them have ever seemed important enough to mention in NF in the past, but with sports in our spotlight for this edition, I figured we could at least acknowledge them.

Instant Sports All-Stars is on its way next, and it will offer baseball, soccer, hockey, basketball, bowling, target shooting and more in July. It also has a hamburger-stacking game, too, because of course it does! It's everyone's favorite sport!

I poke fun at games like these and they'll never earn much critical praise, but they can unironically provide a lot of laughs if you've got the right group playing together in the right frame of mind. **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: JUST FOR GAMES DEVELOPER: BREAK FIRST GAMES RELEASE: JULY 4, 2022 RATING: E

PAC-MAN MUSEUM +

A curated collection of Pac-Man's hits (and misses).

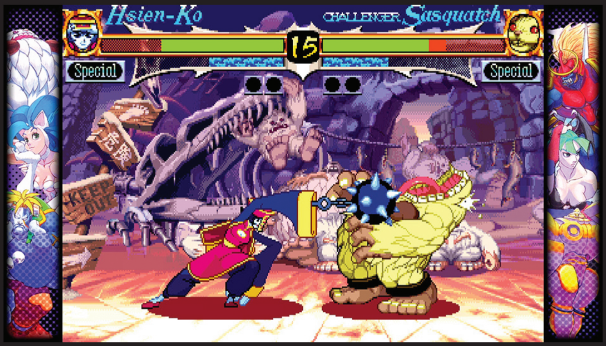
THE IDEA OF "eSports" as we know it today actually owes a lot to Pac-Man. It was one of the first games to drive big cash-prize tournaments across the country, some of which are still going today! Pac-Man's cross-generational, cross-demographic popularity led to the rise of Ms. Pac-Man, Baby Pac-Man, Professor Pac-Man, Jr. Pac-Man and countless other members of the Pac-Brood.

For reasons probably more legal than personal, most of that big, extended Pac-Family wasn't invited to Pac-Man Museum +. Also missing is Pac-Man Plus (which should have gotten in for its name alone) and Pac-Man CE DX (likely omitted because it makes just about every other entry in the Pac-Man series obsolete by comparison).

What we're left with are the 10 titles from 2014's original Pac-Man Museum: Pac-Man, Super Pac-Man, Pac & Pal, Pac-Land, Pac-Mania, Pac-Attack, Pac-Man Championship Edition, Pac-Man Arrangement PSP and Pac-Man Battle Royale. New for this "+" upgrade of the bundle are five additional oddities: Pac-In-Time (an SNES platformer in which Pac-Man runs afoul of a witch!), Pac-Man Arrangement Arcade (like the PSP version, but different), Pac-Motos (a crossover with Motos, a classic bumper cars arcade game), Pac 'n Roll Remix (an enhanced version of the DS title) and Pac-Man 256 (from the makers of Crossy Road).

There are a few stinkers here, but the stellar standouts and rarities in the mix make this collection an easy pickup for Pac-fanatics everywhere. But where is Pac-Man Vs., the asymmetrical multiplayer masterpiece, and Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures, the game about making Pac-Man hate his life? Can any Pac-Man retrospective truly be complete without those two pac-uliar entries in the prevailing pac-pantheon? Maybe they'll be added as DLC "pacs" sometime after this plus-sized museum opens its doors to the paying public on May 27. **– JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: BANDAI NAMCO RELEASE: MAY 27, 2022 RATING: E



CAPCOM FIGHTING COLLECTION

A 10-pack of classic clashes from Capcom!

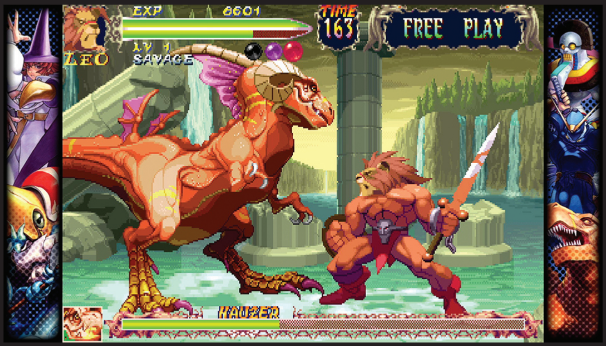
NO-HOLDS-BARRED competitive street fighting is a dangerous sport, and in most parts of the world, it's also illegal. But what happens when the pugilists trading blows start breaking the laws of nature and science on top of those of community safety? Capcom Fighting Collection has the answer.

A follow-up to Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection from 2018, this bundle adds online play and other new features to 10 classic arcade games, all representing an era when Capcom was constantly pushing boundaries. The list kicks off with five Darkstalkers titles, Capcom's now-dormant franchise that mixes up monsters from every mythos. There's Chinese ghosts, American werewolves, punk rock zombies and even a murderous spin on Little Red Riding Hood, all diving headfirst into a bloody slapstick battle to the death. In fact, some of these creatures weren't even alive to begin with!

There's also lesser-known games like the giant mecha brawler Cyberbots: Full Metal Madness and Red Earth, a truly obscure "Ninja vs. Dinosaur vs. Lion Man" high fantasy fighter. Playing both will help you prepare for Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo (a gem-crushing puzzler with a dash of fighting) and Super Gem Fighter Mini Mix (a fighter with a side order of gem crushing). Those two feature super deformed versions of faces from Street Fighter, Darkstalkers, Cyberbots and Red Earth. Stuffed beneath those headlining titles is Hyper Street Fighter 2, a re-re-re-reiteration of the legend that started it all.

Confused yet? Well, breathe and just relax with the knowledge that this collection is sure to be a smash hit when it hits stores on June 24! **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE: JUNE 24, 2022 RATING: T



TWO POINT CAMPUS

Design and build your own university!

I LIVE IN a college town. And the thing that you might not know, if you don't also live in a college town, is that college towns are known for more than just large populations of 20-somethings, boisterous late-night parties and 24-hour restaurants — they're also constantly under construction. In the over two decades that I've lived on and around the University of Kentucky campus, for example, I can't recall a single year in which some portion of the grounds wasn't being rebuilt, remodeled or just plain removed. It's neverending.

Two Point Campus aims to put you in charge of bringing order to exactly that kind of chaos. As the planner of an all-new university, you get to be the one to make all the decisions for which buildings go where, what kinds of pathways will connect them, what types of landscaping will beautify the grounds and more.

And that's just the beginning of your responsibilities! Beyond the creation of the campus' physical spaces, you'll also be the one who's called upon to prepare the course list for incoming students, as well as hire professors, build libraries and study spaces and make sure that every undergraduate has the best possible chance of seeing their collegiate career through all the way to commencement day.

Keeping things light is the fact that the courses you can choose to offer include ridiculous things like Knight School (for students who'd like to learn how to joust on horseback) and Gastronomy (for those seeking careers as chefs who cook pizzas that are bigger than a truck). It's the same style of humor we first saw from this same development team when they introduced the world to Two Point Hospital a few years ago. But personally, the idea of creating my own college strikes me as a lot more fun than the prospect of making my own medical facility. If you're intrigued too, enroll on August 9! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: TWO POINT STUDIOS RELEASE: AUGUST 9, 2022 RATING: T

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: NINTENDO & THE POKÉMON COMPANY DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK RELEASE: LATE 2022 RATING: RP

POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET

Game Freak is wasting no time – say hello to Generation IX!

WE'RE DOING THIS already? I guess we're doing this already.

Less than one month after the release of Pokémon Legends: Arceus – a game that was bold, ambitious, took major steps to advance the gameplay of the franchise as a whole and would absolutely have been able to carry the torch for all of Pokémon for at least a year – Game Freak and The Pokémon Company decided to sweep it aside.

With no time in the interim at all to catch our collective breath after first exploring the Hisui region, we've now been given another all-new region to look forward to, in an all-new pair of mainline Pokémon games that, yes, will mark the official launch of Gen IX. Friends, Pokémon Scarlet & Violet are coming. And soon! They're scheduled to launch before the end of 2022.

It's Pokémon overload!

That may be a bit hyperbolic, but honestly this timeline is kind of crazily crammed when looking back on the usual pace of Pokémon releases. Even before Legends: Arceus hit in January, we had Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl just two months prior. Assuming Scarlet & Violet launch this November, that'll be three huge Pokémon quests spread across five cartridges all within the span of 12 months. It's really a lot.

So the developers at Game Freak will have to do the work to convince us all that we need another Pokémon fix so quickly! Luckily, it looks like they're ready to do just that. Scarlet & Violet appear to be going yet another step above and beyond what we just got finished celebrating as an exploration revelation in Legends: Arceus – Gen IX is promised to be fully open-world!

We didn't quite hit that point in the Hisui region. It was carved up into five major areas, and you couldn't travel from one of them to any other without first heading back to the hub town of Jubilife Village to give the game a chance to load the massive environments. In Scarlet & Violet, however, it seems like Game Freak might have finally cracked the formula and will be able to present a fully seamless region with no forced borders or loading screens. You'll simply be able to walk across the whole expansive space in any direction you want, dipping in and out of towns and other points of interest along the way!

We don't yet know the name of this new region, but it's inspired by Spain (and perhaps Portugal too, its next-door neighbor on the real-world Iberian Peninsula). One prominent city is based largely on Barcelona, with a central structure that resembles the famous Sagrada Familia basilica. Rolling hills and winding paths surround the city, trailing off in all directions – at first glance, this really does look like a Pokémon region that is encouraging players to pick their own destinations and just go!

Our young protagonists this time seem to be students, perhaps enrolled in a different school depending on which game version you play. Do you

THE GRASS CAT POKÉMON
SPRIGATITO

While Game Freak and The Pokémon Company didn't give us a ton of gameplay information about Scarlet & Violet up front, they did do us the favor of revealing the series' newest starter trio right away! Your first option for a first partner Pokémon in this Spain-inspired region will be Sprigatito, a Grass-type kitty cat. Cats are well-represented in Pokémon as a whole at this point – we've previously met Meowth, Skitty, Espurr, Glameow, Purrloin and many, many more. We even just got a kitten as a starter two generations ago: Alola's Fire-type cat, Litten. So Sprigatito will likely be welcomed by fans who've loved any of those cats in the past – but it will also have to find a way to really set itself apart from the pack if it wants to make a lasting impression. Early fan hopes appear to be pinned on its evolutions remaining quadrupedal (which seems unlikely).

THE FIRE CROC POKÉMON
FUECOCO

Instantly asserting itself as more unique than "Grass-type cat" is this goofy little grinner. Fuecoco is a crocodile, which we have seen before in the form of Totodile and Sandile and their evolutions – but that's a far smaller list than the dozens of distinct cats from the past. Even without as much competition from similar animal kingdom inspirations, though, Fuecoco is still working to make itself feel unique by also bringing a second inspiration to the table: peppers! This 'mon is like a living, fire-breathing chili pepper with a winning smile. That unmistakable food connection might be our best clue as to where Fuecoco will go evolution-wise, with some fans hoping we'll see it head toward the never-before-used Fire/Grass type combination (since peppers are plants), or perhaps end up as a Fire/Ghost to make reference to super spicy ghost peppers!

prefer a scarlet-accented outfit, or would you like a violet look to begin with? (If you don't want to look like a kid skipping out on class for the whole journey, don't worry – wardrobe changes will surely be back again.)

Also returning from the recent past will be Pokémon battles that take place right in the overworld itself. We just saw this in Legends: Arceus, but Scarlet & Violet would be the first traditional Pokémon RPGs to not have quick cutaways to separate, contained battle spaces when encountering a wild Pokémon. Does that mean freely throwing Poké Balls at wild creatures will return too? We don't know yet!

And that's just where Game Freak wants us right now: knowing enough to leave us wanting to know more. It's how they've set up the Pokémon hype cycle before, and how they're doing it again!

Wanting to get back into that tried-and-true rhythm is likely why we're getting this game so quickly after the launch of Legends and BDSP, too. It's probable that those titles were meant to debut earlier than they did, but got delayed by COVID-19 complications. Scarlet & Violet being on track for Late 2022 means Game Freak's back on track as a whole, then, and that's exciting news indeed! **– LUCAS**

THE DUCKLING POKÉMON
QUAXLEY

Saving the best for last, here's the newest Water-type starter, Quaxley! (I've been informed by my sons that "Quaxley is the best" is my opinion for Scarlet & Violet, as Carter quickly laid claim to Sprigatito and Calvin called dibs on Fuecoco, which left me with the duck.) I don't feel stuck with the duck, though! Honestly, I probably would have picked this tiny quacker of my own accord regardless, as the "young Donald Duck" look is hitting all the right notes in my DuckTales-loving heart. Instantly I've begun to wonder whether Quaxley's evolutions will bring it even more in line with Donald's classic characterization of being a sailor – I can easily picture its wavy tuft of hair up there transforming into something like a captain's hat as it grows. Maybe wielding a feathery sword? Or would that be too similar to Sirfetch'd? I guess we'll all find out later this year!

BY JONATHAN HOLMES

ROBOTS PLAYING BASEBALL!

CYBER STADIUM SERIES: BASE WARS
NES, 1991

With sports in the spotlight of this NF issue, I have to pay homage to the sports game that most captured my imagination as an NES kid: Base Wars! How could any kid ignore that epic boxart showcasing a brutal baseball battle being fought between robots? And then the game itself totally lived up to that promo art, presenting huge robot players that dominated the screen. These mechanical men had uniform torsos, but their bottom halves could be normal legs, tank treads, a UFO-shaped hovering pod or the mono motorcycle wheel seen just above. The pitchers fired baseballs out of arm cannons! And if a throw to base was ever too close to call, the players would beat each other up in a fistfighting minigame. Wow! — **LUCAS**

TRAPPED IN THE PAST
MEGA MAN SOCCER

Remembering the Blue Bomber's one and only sports spin-off!

SO MARIO'S STRAPPING on his cleats and taking to the footy field again for a new sequel in the Strikers series on Switch. However, did you know that he wasn't the first major video game mascot character to star in his own self-titled soccer spin-off?

Before everyone's favorite plumber took to the pitch, none other than the Blue Bomber, Mega Man, was blasting his way toward a winning goal in the world's most popular sport. The seeming impetus for the switch from platforming and pew-pewing to sports was Capcom's sponsorship of a team in Japan's soccer league. Much like how Sega tends to release Mario & Sonic Olympic games alongside more "normal" simulations, Capcom also released Capcom's Soccer Shootout for the Super NES in that same year of 1994.

So, what makes a soccer game a *Mega Man* soccer game? Well, there's the inclusion of Mega Man, of course – and lots of him! When Dr. Wily starts sending his Robot Masters out to ruin soccer games the world over, Dr. Light upgrades Mega Man from Super Fighting Robot to Super Footy Robot, and gives him an entire team of clones as backup!

As Mega Man challenges a variety of rebuilt Robot Masters from his first four NES adventures (along with Proto Man, Enker from Dr. Wily's Revenge and Dr. Wily himself), he doesn't just take weapons from fallen opponents; rather, he recruits them to his team, and can thus utilize their respective special "Shoot" attacks (in addition to his own Mega Buster Charge Shot – er, "Shoot") to blast clear through the goalie and straight into the net!

This all sounds pretty cool, and in a way, it is! It was especially novel as a fan at the time to not only get to see Mega Man running around from a new 3/4 perspective, but also in 16-bit! At this point in time, Rock's successor, X, seemed to have firmly taken the reins of the franchise in the 16-bit era, making this our first look at the original Mega Man and his cast in all their 16-bit glory. (Heck, even the box art looks like it was revised from the original U.S. Mega Man X box art.)

However, there was one minor flaw amidst all the cool stuff: The game just wasn't all that fun to play. Nintendo Power rated it a 3.275 out of 5 in their 60th issue, noting that "the poor play control is uncharacteristic of Capcom games." Other outlets of the day similarly derided the controls as sluggish and also noted slowdown during play, a sentiment that would seemingly sideline a speculative sequel.

With that said, the game *does* have its fans. Jeremy Parish of Retronauts said of the game on 1UP.com that it was "weirdly enjoyable," and "nonsensical, sure, but awfully fun."

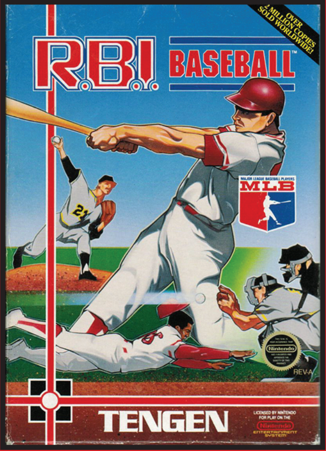
Over the years, a small but growing number of fans have been clamoring for a follow-up. Next Level Games showed that it's possible to create a soccer game featuring gaming mascots that does right by everyone involved, and for a time, there was even hope that Capcom might approach the company about creating a sequel. Some have even created Mega Man Soccer fan art in the same furiously sketchy style seen in art used for the Mario Strikers titles. However, with Nintendo having recently acquired Next Level, it looks like those dreams may sadly be quashed . . . for now, at least.

Despite being a one-off side game, though, Mega Man Soccer has left an unquestionable mark on the character, as soccer has become a staple of the original Blue Bomber ever since. In addition to comic and manga references, Mega Man 8 introduced the explosive Mega Ball, and in Marvel vs. Capcom, it even took on a more soccer ball-styled appearance! **— DAVID**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: SNES, MARCH 1994
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
DEVELOPER: SUN L

SUPER RUSHED

One of the most notorious facets that didn't help Mega Man Soccer's popularity is that the game was seemingly rushed to market. It's since been discovered that the game's "Capcom Championship" (read: story) and Tournament modes, which infamously had no endings, actually *did* have endings created and ready to go – they just don't activate upon completion. Instead, the game just returns to the title screen, which has a knock-on effect of also preventing Dr. Wily from being unlocked as a playable character as intended. Fortunately, some hackers out there have managed to create patches for the game that can restore this functionality when played via certain methods. What hasn't been restored is the support for up to four players that was at one time planned! Perhaps if Capcom includes this in a future Legacy Collection, they can fix things up so that fans can finally have the full, intended Mega Man Soccer experience.



ORIGINAL RELEASE: NES, JUNE 1988
PUBLISHER: TENGEN
DEVELOPER: NAMCO

EARLY EFFORTS

Though Famista in an unaltered form has never left Japan, some entries have been modified for North America, resulting in Extra Bases for Game Boy, Batter Up for Game Gear and Super Batter Up for SNES. The first adaptation was actually 1988's R.B.I. Baseball for NES, also notable as the first console game to use official Major League Baseball player names. Famista also served as the framework for R.B.I. 2 and 3, but while the first reused Famista's music and graphics, the sequels opted for a more Western makeover.

LATEST RELEASE: SWITCH, SEPTEMBER 17, 2020 (IN JAPAN) PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO DEVELOPER: EIGHTING

GETTING INTO THE SERIES TODAY

Switch has welcomed both 2018's Famista Evolution and the more recent Famista 2020, and thanks to the console's region-free playback capabilities, your only obstacle is deciding which to order from your import shop of choice. There was a time you could purchase them from Japan's eShop as well, but they have sadly been delisted thanks to that most vile of video game villains: licensing restrictions. All those official team and player names don't come cheap, you know! Keep in mind that you'll only have a little more than a year to obtain a digital copy if and when a Famista follow-up appears.

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION THE FAMISTA SERIES

One of Japan's best baseball brands has rarely been seen Stateside.

BASEBALL MAY BE "America's national pastime," but its ongoing decline in U.S. viewership and attendance calls that label into question. There's no debate regarding baseball's cultural cachet in Japan, however, where even the nationwide high school tournament known as Kōshien attracts a wide audience on par with professional events. Yakyū – as it's called in Japanese – may be played nearly identically to its Western counterpart, yet its atmosphere is much more exuberant and encouraging of spectator participation. I'd go as far as to guarantee that attending a live match can be life-changing even for those with little interest in sports!

Of the existing Japanese baseball video game franchises, my personal favorite is Bandai Namco's Pro Yakyū Family Stadium, a.k.a. Famista. Debuting on Famicom in 1987, the series has remained mostly Nintendo-exclusive, appearing on every platform save Virtual Boy and Wii U. It has endured so long thanks in great part to its adherence to simplicity – while other sports titles have tilted more toward real-world simulation as hardware progressed, Famista has maintained an arcade feel that is inviting to newcomers.

Famista is also special to me on a personal level. During the late '80s, my family lived in Yokohama, where my Dad played for the Taiyō Whales, known today as the DeNA BayStars. I would watch him perform on the field, then I'd retreat to my room and try the home game. Furthermore, Famista was one of only a couple of video games that he could actually play with me, so many a father-son bonding moment was shared on the virtual diamond. (Of course, it didn't hurt that the games were fun and highly polished as well!)

The original installments on Famicom featured cute, stocky players with round faces and orbs for hands, alongside a peppy soundtrack that perfectly emulated the rally music heard in Japanese stadiums. The latest Switch entry, Pro Yakyū Famista 2020, doesn't stray from this aesthetic, although now you can select either one of the teams from the Nippon Professional Baseball league or any of several composite teams assembled from the various minor, independent and women's leagues across Japan. There's even a team of retired foreign players – and yes, my Dad *is* on the roster!

Aside from the typical exhibition, pennant and multiplayer modes, there is also a full RPG campaign, in which metal-skinned aliens challenge the Earth to a decisive baseball showdown. In very Space Jam fashion, you must assemble a team of Namco mascots, including such throwback stars as Wonder Momo, Mappy and even the spaceship from Xevious! Leading the team is a disturbingly human version of Pac-Man, who awakens as the legendary hero "Famislugger" and glows with a Super Saiyan-like aura. So . . . that's a thing!

The beauty of the Famista series is that it's based on a sport many are already familiar with, so the language barrier is not much of a hindrance. Sure, you might not be able to enjoy parts like the story mode, but the pleasure of experiencing baseball via Japan's colorful sensibilities may lead to an appreciation for the sport that you may not have gained otherwise. **– TONY**

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

NINTENDO POWER IS DOOMED!

At least, that's how it looked on the cover of the May 1997 issue, as DOOM 64 took the cover spot. This bit of N64 fun was joined by more Blast Corps, Star Fox 64 and FIFA Soccer 64! That last one also garnered a back-up feature looking at footy fun from the past and future, which you can catch a glimpse of in the spread below.

Those still playing with Super Power were treated to a fold-out spread of Donkey Kong Country 3, which shared its magazine real estate with a poster for The Lost Vikings 2 on the opposite side, as well as its own feature in the following pages. And for Game Boy aficionados who were still waiting for Pokémon mania to become a thing in the West, Interplay offered the variety of 4-in-1 Fun Pak, a compilation of digital versions of classic board games such as Backgammon, Checkers and Chess. A separate Casino Fun Pak had Blackjack, Slots, Roulette and more, and then there was another dedicated to myriad versions of Solitaire.

Epic Center teased RPG fans with visions of Mystical Ninja on N64 and the ill-fated EarthBound 64, while Enix's Japan-only N64 title Wonder Project J2 got its own two-page spread. Harvest Mooninites would, however, receive a plentiful bounty of tips and tricks spread over four pages.

This issue's Arena section went extra long, showing off the results of a Super Mario 64 funny faces contest and the winners of the Mario Kart 64 Nintendo Power Cup. Elsewhere, the winner of this month's Player's Poll contest would score a trip to a World Cup qualifier soccer match, via FIFA Soccer 64, where the U.S. took on Mexico (plus a copy of the game, natch).

Speaking of the Player's Poll, the winners of the 1996 Nintendo Power Awards were revealed there. Super Mario RPG took the top honor for the Super NES and Donkey Kong Land 2 did the same for Game Boy, but which would be voted the best of the best for the N64? Super Mario 64, of course!

Finally, Pak Watch closed the issue out with peeks at Robotron 64, War Gods and "the biggest gaming announcement of the year so far," in which Castlevania was revealed to be headed to 64-bit.

NP #97 in June was headlined by the latest entry in the ClayFighter series, 63 1/3, complete with Boogerman socking it to Bad Mr. Frosty on the cover. Inside the pages, it was joined on the Fun Machine by Hexen, the Mortal Kombat-inspired Midway title War Gods and previews of Space Station: Silicon Valley and Aero Fighters Assault. Plus, the poster shared exclusive maps for Turok: Dinosaur Hunter and exclusive art for Star Fox 64. And if that wasn't enough, Dark Horse and Nintendo Power teamed up once more to bring you the comic tale of the Blast Corps!

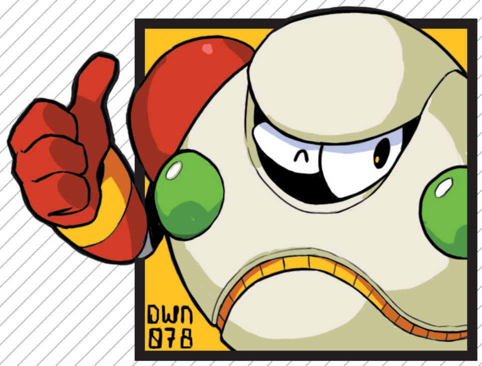
Turning to Page 66, you'd find something you don't see every day — at least, not in 1997: a deluxe database of every Mega Man boss to date, from the NES to the Game Boy and the Super NES, complete with their weaknesses and what special weapon you get for defeating them. What's more, they also made an index of past NP coverage of Mega Man titles, too! With Mega Man 8 and X4 both headed to non-Nintendo platforms that same year, I guess NP had to make do with looking to the past.

Elsewhere, we got peeks at the 1997 Tokyo Game Show, tips for Capcom's Aladdin on SNES and Donkey Kong Land 2 on Game Boy and a Player's Poll contest in which the winner would receive a literal ton of pennies (or the cash value thereof). Try doing the math on that!

Closing things out, Pak Watch treated us to Extreme G, Mission Impossible and a little game called "Zelda 64" that was already the most tantalizing future release at this point. Though it would be another 17 months before it arrived! **— DAVID**

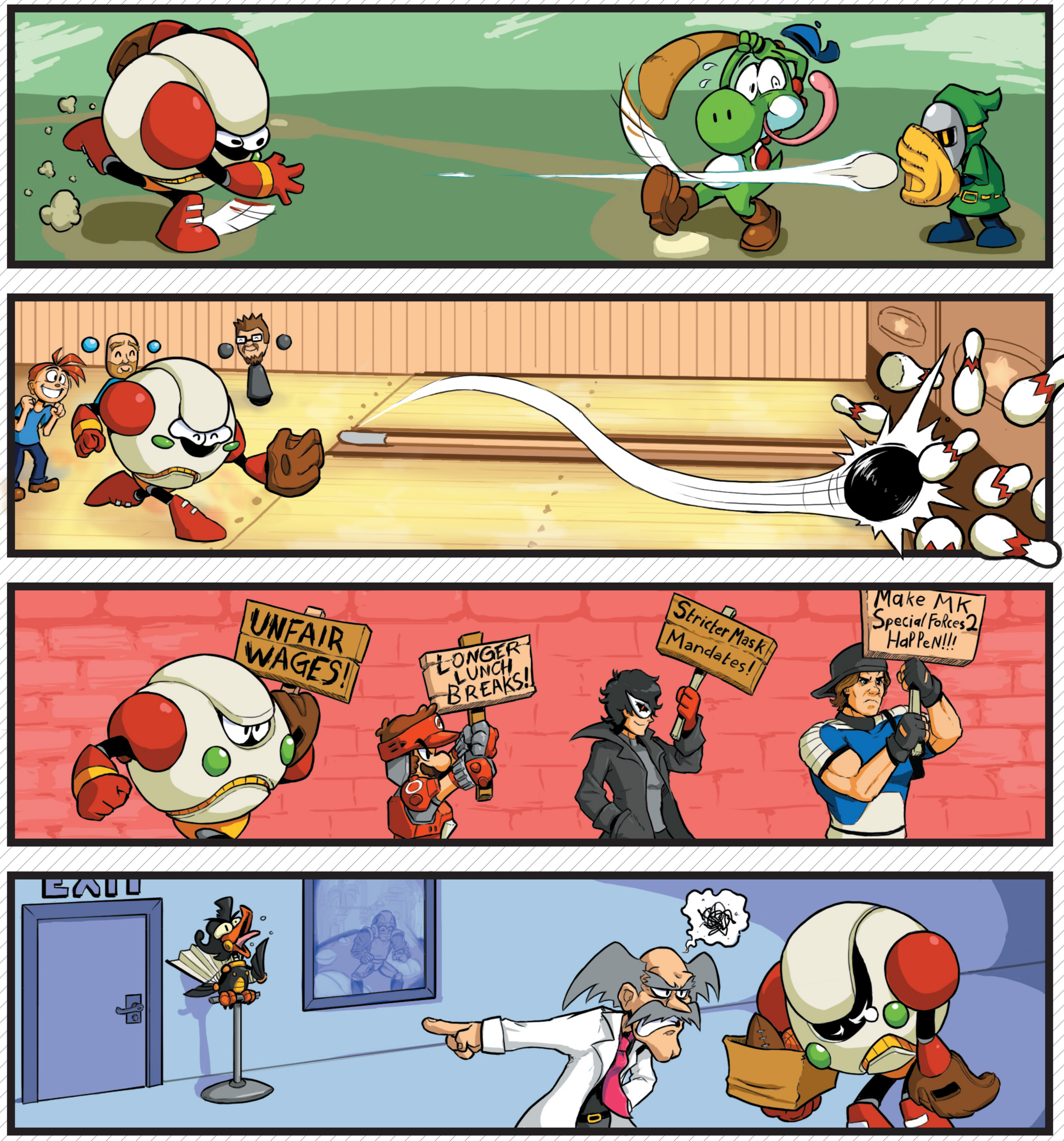
ISSUE #96: MAY 1997

ISSUE #97: JUNE 1997



STRIKE MAN IN...

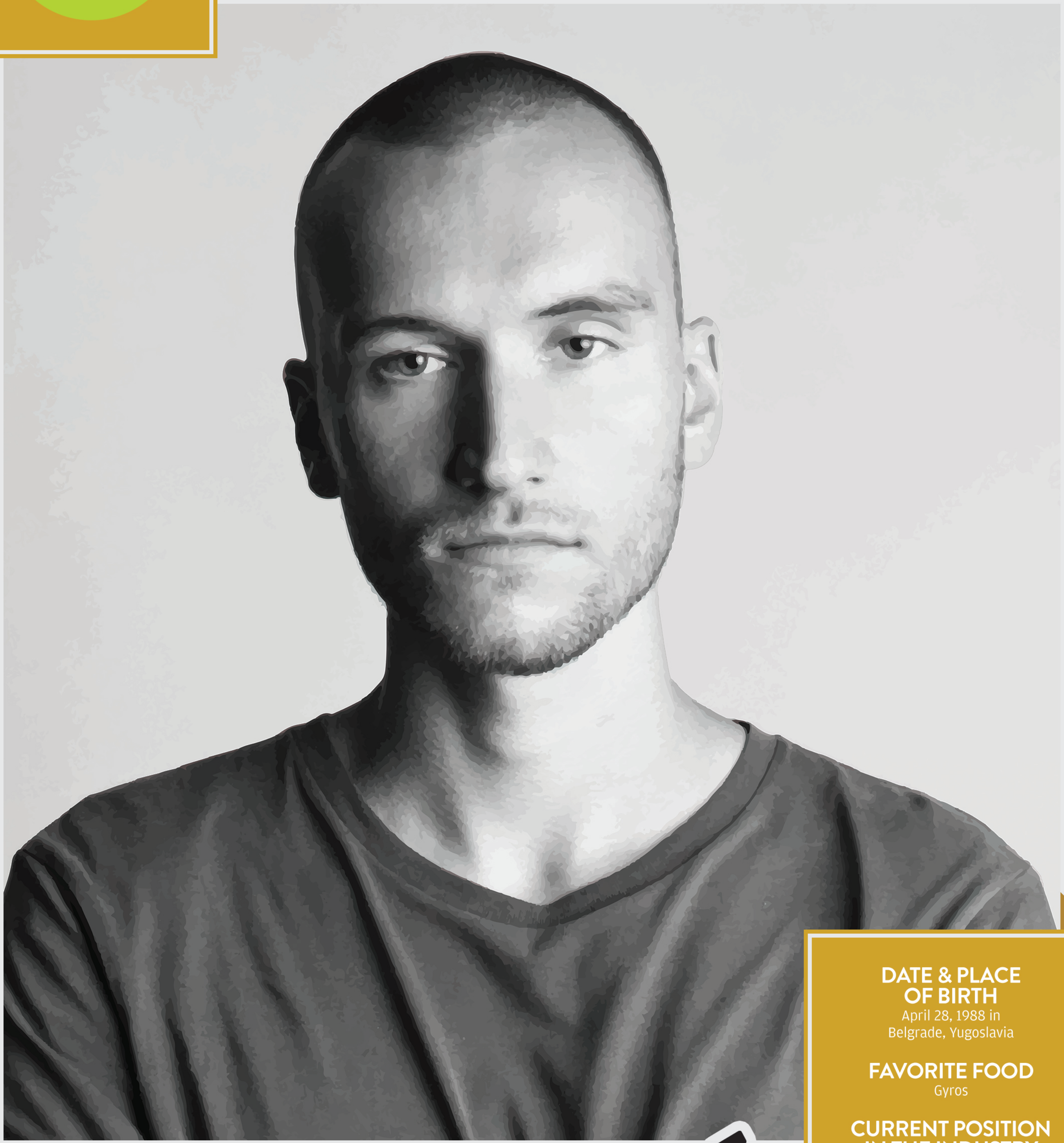
THREE STRIKES, YOU'RE OUT!



ILLUSTRATED BY KARAKATO

WRITTEN BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

INTERVIEW



DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
April 28, 1988 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia

FAVORITE FOOD
Gyros

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
CEO of a gaming studio

BEST KNOWN FOR
Golf Club: Wasteland and its soundtrack, Radio Nostalgia from Mars

IGOR SIMIĆ

The visionary who invites gamers to play golf amidst the rubble of a post-apocalyptic Earth.

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: What inspired you to become a video game developer?

IGOR: My main goal in life was to become a filmmaker, so I studied filmmaking at Columbia University in New York. While there, the famous Paul Schrader once mentioned in class that the future will be interactive storytelling. "Wanting to make the new French New Wave masterpiece in the 2010s is anachronistic," he argued. Since all my friends are developers and engineers, I gave video games a go and it turned out alright.

You once said that your studio was going to be "content creators who will live to see World War III." That's a pretty powerful statement, especially in light of current events. How did your frustration and despair about global injustices drive you to start developing games that speak to those issues?

As a kid, I lived through the '90s in Belgrade – through the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Then I studied in New York in the midst of the financial crisis. My facetious claim that we make entertainment for the end times simply comes from a place of interest in reality. So our games, animations and music are grounded in Earthly issues, rather than being fully escapist.

People usually play games to feel better, not worse. What's your strategy toward getting players who just want to relax and forget about the world's troubles to start thinking in a way that may challenge their complacency?

By and large the response of the gaming community was very good in spite of Golf Club: Wasteland's backdrop of the Great Ecological Catastrophe. I think the reason for this is that the game is not preachy. We have no agenda to "teach" people anything. It's entertainment – just not completely sanitized and vapid. Rick & Morty or Bojack Horseman fall into that category, for instance.

Tell us about your passion for "transmedia storytelling." Is telling a story your primary goal with your games, with gameplay being just one tool in your storytelling toolbox, or could you imagine yourself ever making a game that's entirely about play and not at all about story?

Gaming is the cornerstone of our business. But creatively and economically, the entertainment industry is moving in the direction of being agnostic about the medium. One IP can exist as a movie, a TV show, an animated series, a game, a VR experience, a tabletop game, a graphic novel, etc., and there's no inherent hierarchy between these media. To demonstrate this philosophy, we created three animated music videos around Golf Club: Wasteland that people can watch on our website and on YouTube. Plus the soundtrack, which is a radio program. These are all different points of entry into the same world and story.

Golf Club: Wasteland has been called "Angry Birds meets Blade Runner." You play as a future billionaire who uses a burnt-out, uninhabitable Earth as a giant, exotic golf course. What inspired this idea, and do you think it may ever get a sequel using another apocalyptic sport as a premise? (Extreme Climate Change Boogie Boarding? Pandemic Action Football?)

At the time when we came up with the concept for Golf Club: Wasteland, Elon Musk was increasingly becoming a celebrity and talking about making Mars his home. In politics, Donald Trump was about to become the United States' president. One of his businesses was making golf courses. I saw a news clip about him being in conflict with Scottish locals over a golf course he wanted to build. So the sum of these two ideas ended up being the game's premise: When human life could no longer be sustained on Earth, the ultra-rich escaped to Tesla City on Mars – and the rest of us died. Years later, the citizens of Mars occasionally return to Earth to play golf in the ruins of human civilization.

Before making Golf Club: Wasteland, had you ever played real-life golf yourself? And did you enjoy it?

Nope. Never did. Not even mini-golf. I still don't know the rules. But I'm a fan of Curb Your Enthusiasm and Larry David plays golf, so I guess that's enough.

What if you become a billionaire, like the kind of person that you parody in Golf Club: Wasteland? What would you do with your money?

Let's cross that bridge when we get there.

You've announced two upcoming games: Highwater and The Cub. It looks like both will stick with Golf Club: Wasteland's dystopian theme, with bombed-out buildings and radioactive ramen playing a part in one or more of their stories. What else can you tell us about them?

Players of Golf Club: Wasteland noticed there's a mutant kid in the game. Well, that kid is the main character of our new title, The Cub. Already from the trailer people can tell that Nintendo platformers were a huge influence. Highwater takes place in the same world, but I'll be able to say more about that one this summer.

GDC 2022 is happening as we're doing this interview, and a lot of devs at the event have been saying that the modern indie market is something of a wasteland. It's so much harder to stand out these days, and anyone wanting to sell a game using standard game pricing is struggling. What do you make of those issues?

We'll see how things will unfold this year. But with a strong team of 20 and one compelling universe in three different games, we're in a good position to make a name in the PC/console space. Our aim is to be leaders in original entertainment content that also matches the values that we want to see in the world. The ambition is to do what major Japanese IPs have managed, such as One Piece – to create a world full of compelling characters and themes.

Any advice for new developers just starting out?

Giving advice is very difficult because I've realized that most successful people, if you press them, don't really have a formula or a how-to kit. If they do, very often they fall into "gambler's bias." At any rate, the only advice I can give is for the team to identify their strengths and pick the scope of their projects so that the investment of time and effort is reasonable, while truly showcasing those skills (in our case art, sound, story) that stand out globally.

If you had an unlimited budget to make a game using any Nintendo franchise, what would you make and why?

Zelda. The main reason is that the world is really the main character and that's how we approach our games – world-building is the starting point.

Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?

To dunk a basketball. As far as I'm concerned, that's a superpower. NF

BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

The PlayStation-made **MLB The Show** series has just showed up on the Switch. Is it a home run, or does it strike out?

You Can Take This Show on the Road

MLB THE SHOW 22

IT'S HARD NOT to be romantic about baseball. The oldest major American sport, baseball is a conversation across generations. There are few greater joys in life than a warm summer evening on the porch with a cool drink and a ballgame on the radio. That experience can now be enhanced, as MLB The Show 22 has just brought gaming's most realistic baseball franchise to the Switch.

With a host of improvements, new legends and new features, The Show 22 is a jam-packed package for Switch owners looking to scratch their sports itch at home or on the go. Once the initial weirdness of the PlayStation Studios logo booting up has disappeared, players will find a fully realized version of The Show in their hands – one with all the content and features of its competing console counterparts (minus user-created stadiums).

To get the negative out of the way, The Show on Switch does not look as good as it does on the PS5 or Xbox Series X. The real-time shadows are absent, and there are anti-aliasing issues that create some jaggies. An early season patch has cleaned up the visuals somewhat, and there are more planned. Just how much work can be done to boost the visuals on Switch is a question only Sony can answer.

However, unlike other franchises that have decided to cut corners on content to make their games look better on Switch, Sony decided on a different, more welcome path. Opting to focus on gameplay/content rather than graphics (which don't look bad, just decidedly more "last gen"), San Diego Studio has delivered the same deep baseball sim across all platforms. And by deep, think cavernous. The amount of content available the first time you play is staggering, and may be overwhelming to new players.

Thankfully, in-game tutorials walk players through every step – either through short video presentations or text-based dialogue boxes – to get you up to speed and onto the field. Custom practice is available for all aspects of the game, including the new fielding practice this year. Like real-life baseball, The Show requires minor tweaks here and there to play your best, and those new to the franchise will have to spend some time finding just the right combination of cameras and controls that work for them.

On the field is where the game really shines. Playing on Switch not only feels like baseball, but, more importantly, feels good to play. SDS has worked steadily over the years to improve the feel of the gameplay, adding new animations in all facets of the game. This year is no different, with new animations for batting, fielding and pitching that make the game more realistic and dynamic.

In Handheld Mode, the Joy-Cons do an admirable job of managing all of the different aspects of baseball. Controlling the pitcher and fielders on defense and the batter and runners on offense is intuitive and easy to handle.

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT & MLBAM
DEVELOPER: SAN DIEGO STUDIO RATING: E

Pinpoint pitching – one of the various methods of pitching – is a bit more challenging in Handheld Mode, as the fighting game-like motions needed to throw pitches using the thumbsticks may be encumbered by the size of your own hands. Batting is responsive when playing portably as well – connecting with a perfect swing and driving a ball 450 feet into the upper decks is deeply satisfying.

In TV Mode the game is just as responsive, with no noticeable lag in my setup (DualSense controller paired using an 8BitDo adapter). Switching from docked to portable is quick, and, at least in my experience, has caused no issues with dropping connections or getting booted from a game.

An online connection is not strictly required for The Show, but it's highly recommended. You may be thinking, "I have zero intention of playing against other people – I just want to build a team and play against the CPU." The good news is, you absolutely can. The bad news is, you absolutely can only in certain modes. Diamond Dynasty, the ultimate team mode in The Show, requires an online connection even if you only play the offline missions. Road to The Show, March to October, Franchise and others all allow for completely offline play. All of the live content, however – programs/cards/missions/etc. – is gated online.

Online co-op, new to The Show this year, works pretty well. There are some kinks that need to be worked out on the server side, but when it works, it's a blast. Joining one or two other random players online and playing through a game is a lot of fun. In a two-player setup, one player controls the pitcher and the other controls the fielders on defense, while you each take turns batting on offense. In a three-player setup, one controls the pitcher, one controls the infield and the last player controls the outfield. Batting is exactly the same. Roles change in each inning, so you need to make sure you understand your place on the team. There are minimal chat options, but most players have been helpful and encouraging – a welcome sign in online gaming.

Speaking of Diamond Dynasty, there are a few changes this year that aim to streamline the experience and allow all players access to the highest level cards available. Programs, which vary in time, are progress-based events that give players the opportunity to earn experience, stubs, cards and packs through playing the game. In previous years certain goals were tied to specific players. "Get X number of hits with Paul Molitor," for example. This year, goals are tied to Parallel Experience for certain players.

Parallel Experience (a.k.a. "PXP") is gained each time a card is used in a Diamond Dynasty mode, no matter how good you perform. If you enter a game with Luis Robert on your squad, you gain PXP whether you hit bombs or wear the golden sombrero. The better you do the more PXP you gain, obviously, but this change allows everyone to grind the necessary points to complete the program and earn the rewards.

In addition to player- and team-specific goals, conquest maps are another way to gain experience in DD. These maps require the player to take their DD squad and conquer enemy territories. It plays like a game of Risk, where you have to increase the size of your fanbase and play/simulate games against opponents. The more fans you have, the easier you can set the difficulty for each game. Each conquest map contains a number of goals that reward packs, stubs and sometimes players. Finishing the map grants you experience to some programs. In addition, Battle Royale and Events have also been streamlined this year to allow players to grind out their respective rewards online as well.

The newest addition to DD is Mini Seasons – and while not without growing pains, what's there has been fun. In Mini Seasons you take your DD squad against real-life player squads controlled by the CPU. The games play out over three innings and have their own rewards, all while letting you build teams to make progress through the other programs. It's a lot to take in, but it all works seamlessly once you get the hang of it.

While no review can cover every aspect of a game, overall the first year on Switch is nothing short of a success for The Show. The most realistic baseball sim remains just that, all the while being portable. For any baseball fan, The Show is a must-buy. For any sports fan, The Show is a must-buy. With more content dropping throughout the year (and patches to improve the experience too), there's more than enough bang for your buck. **– DAN**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E10+

Athletic Assortment
NINTENDO SWITCH SPORTS

THE Wii MAY be gone, but Wii Sports lives on!

Nintendo Switch Sports may have a mostly new name, be played on a new generation of hardware and look a lot nicer than the original installment did back in 2006, but this is still a Wii Sports experience through and through – it's a collection of inviting athletic events made physically playable through the power of motion-capturing game controllers. No button presses to direct the action here! If you want to swing a tennis racket, you have to really swing your arm. If you want to bowl a bowling ball, you have to make-believe you're in an actual alley and go through the real motions!

This kind of kinetic connection to a video game experience was so novel when Nintendo first introduced Wii Sports and the Wii Remote controller that it took the world by storm . . . but since that happened 16 years ago, it's not so novel anymore. Nintendo Switch Sports can't claim success by simply reintroducing motion control to an audience that largely remembers what it was like the first time around. The question, then, is does this new generation of an old idea do enough to feel fresh and original and justify its existence?

Let's set about answering that by going sport by sport through the six included events.

BOWLING

Without argument, Wii Sports' Bowling event was the stand-out hit of its five-game lineup. It beautifully brought the bowling alley experience into players' homes (minus the rented shoes, dirty locker rooms and sketchy bar food), and it hooked literally millions of people on the Wii as a product. It's still a fixture of retirement communities around the globe to this day! My own Memaw lives in a community with a Wii Bowling day scheduled as an activity for the seniors every week.

Switch Bowling's got a big pair of rented shoes to fill, then. And I think it succeeds – though it has a couple of ways it could be improved.

The basic gameplay of Bowling is still brilliant, as the Joy-Con admirably one-ups the Wii Remote for accuracy in translating your arm's movements into on-screen throws. I was able to settle back into my old rhythm quickly . . . but unfortunately so did most of my online opponents, it seems! The competition in Bowling is tough!

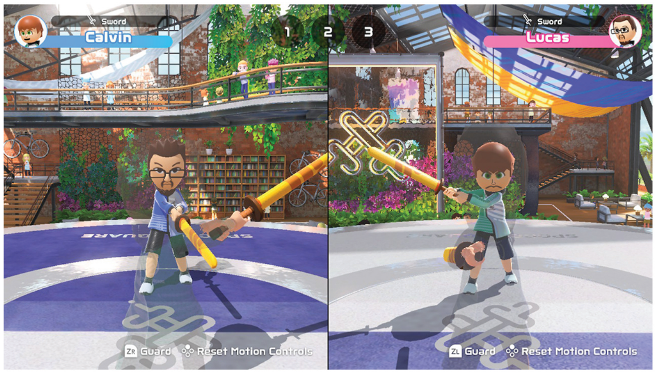
That's a big change from Wii Sports – the 2006 game was an entirely local affair, with no online component. Here on the Switch, though, the experience is fully geared toward encouraging you to go up against online opponents.

For Bowling, that means a new kind of battle royale/survival mode that pits 16 bowlers against one another. Everyone bowls three frames, then the eight players with the lowest scores get eliminated. The top eight move on and bowl three more frames, facing a second cut after that. Ultimately it becomes a battle between just three finalists, and while I was able to come out on top on Day 1 of the game's release (when people weren't quite so practiced), it's been hard to hit the top of the leaderboard again since then!

The elimination system is a bit frustrating, too, because I've been cut a couple of times even when my last throw was a strike or spare, which means my score shouldn't have been finalized yet. But in the interest of keeping things moving along, they just make the cut as if those multipliers don't count. Alas.

Less frustrating and often laugh-out-loud funny is the single-player Special Bowling mode, which pits you against wacky lanes filled with pitfalls and other obstacles. It's a joy to beat those gauntlets . . . and hilarious to fail too. I recommend trying it!

Sadly missing, though, is the 100-Pin Bowling mode from Wii Sports Resort. Why isn't that included here?



SOCCER

We'll circle back to that question, but let's move on to the next sport: Soccer (a.k.a. Nintendo's Rocket League). Or Nintendo's second take on Rocket League after Metroid Prime: Blast Ball – remember that? All of them are similarly executed, as you've got two sides competing to get an oversized ball past the opposition and into a huge goal at the end of the field.

It's a bit weird how all realism flies out the window for Soccer specifically – all the rest of the sports both here and in the old Wii Sports titles try to stay pretty true to real-world rules and, well, ball sizes. But here is a fully video game-y spin on soccer with a gigantic bouncing ball and teams of just four players facing off against each other to try to wrangle it.

I think it was the right call! A totally accurate soccer experience would not have been nearly as much fun as this, as it's a blast to dash around the field, try to outflank the opposition and kick the ball at just the right angle to get it into the goal. Out of all six sports I'd say Soccer's going to have the most replay value over time, too, as each match can feel totally different – unlike Bowling, which is just the same tosses down the same lane every time.

TENNIS

The other returning event from the first Wii Sports (alongside Bowling), Tennis feels just as functional and fun as it did back then. But that's about all there is to say – there have been no big additions here other than online opponents being available whenever you'd like to face them.

One oddity I encountered, though, was that one online match put me into a two-on-one against a pair of human players. They each controlled one character, while I was forced to play as both characters on my side. Why did that happen? It wasn't even a dropped connection or anything. Weird.

BADMINTON

With the game design for Tennis to use as a foundation, Nintendo additionally included the similar racket-swinging sport Badminton in this collection. Though it's actually not as similar as I expected it to be!

Badminton feels much more fast-paced and frantic than Tennis. It's played in closer quarters between just two opponents, and the rallies that get going back and forth between the two sides get truly intense!

The only drawback here is that I'm not sure how much skill is really involved in winning. Sometimes long rallies felt like they'd finally end only because one of the players' arms got tired, or their Joy-Con missed picking up an input quickly enough. Player movement is automatic, and it feels like your shot selection doesn't matter all that much – your player will almost always make it into position to return each shot. An average level of fun.

VOLLEYBALL

How about a third sport that's all about sending a ball back and forth over a net? Volleyball, though, does feel completely unique compared to the other events.

For this sport, it's all about flowing with a constantly shifting mindset. The ball is always in motion, and your role in reacting to it is always changing! If you're on defense, you have to be ready to leap up at the net to block a spike, or get under the ball to bump it back up into the air if the blocker misses. On offense, you might be called upon to set up a spike for your teammate, or you might be the spiker yourself, having to leap up at the net and strike with all your might with just the right timing. All of these actions – and serving, too – have different motions needed to activate them. A big display at the top of the screen gives you a constant heads-up for what's coming next, though, so it's never too overwhelming. Lots of fun!

CHAMBARA

Last and potentially least is Chambara (a.k.a. Swordplay). This one returns from Wii Sports Resort, but it's been enhanced by the addition of optional different swords to wield. The basic Sword is no-frills and gets the job done, but if you want to get fancy you could instead pick up a Charge Sword that lets you charge up for a special strike by successfully blocking your opponent's attacks. Then there's also the Twin Swords, if you want to go wild with dual-wielding! (Two Joy-Cons are required to choose those, though.)

I liked Swordplay back in the Resort days and I still like it here, but I'm not sold on it. I think actual skill just isn't needed to be successful – I played several matches against Calvin, my 8-year-old, and he just wildly swung the Joy-Con in crazy directions with feral intensity. And it worked out for him about half the time! So stately, proper swordfighting like a fencing match this is not. It's often just random bashing.

THE OVERALL INTERFACE
So Bowling and Soccer are the two I'd rate as the best of this bunch, with Volleyball coming in third, Badminton and Tennis following after that and Chambara bringing up the rear. As we covered back in the Download section, though, the selection is set to expand at least once with the addition of Golf this Fall, and it's possible that tweaks to the first six sports (or new modes for them) could also be added at that time. When Nintendo does add Golf, there are some other changes I hope they'll make as well.

Currently there's no progression in single-player play. When you play any of the sports in online mode against human opponents, you earn points for every match you participate in, with extra points if you do cool things like throwing a strike in Bowling. Every time you amass 100 of those points, you can then get a prize – a new piece of clothing for your character to wear, or a new emote to use in matches.

If you play offline, though? Nothing. Nada. There's nothing to earn or level up or anything. Why not make the same set of character customization prizes available to players who prefer to play locally? I don't always want to face off against 15 other bowlers; sometimes I'd just like to bowl by my lonesome. Is that preference not worthy of a shiny new hat?

Even more upsetting for Wii Sports players like me who prefer to use Miis over the new "Sportsmates" avatars is the fact that all of the unlockables are made just for the Sportsmates. You can use your old Mii, but it comes in as it's been saved and can't be modified or upgraded in any way. Where is that super fancy suite of Mii-customizing options from the Miitopia Switch port? We can't get a bone thrown to us here? This is Mii erasure, I'm telling you!

SETTLE IN FOR THE LONG HAUL
Going back again to my Download piece, though, I'm going to try to be patient with Nintendo Switch Sports. This game's just getting started.

For every absence in this Day 1 package that's making me ask again "Why isn't *that* included here?" I'm trying to remember that, well, it might be included in the future. Perhaps 100-Pin Bowling will be brought back, but it's just being held for later. Maybe single-player play will get some kind of progression system after Nintendo sees the negative feedback coming in about it not being in place already.

It's a lot of maybes. As it stands at launch, Nintendo Switch Sports is a good game and a fun way to revisit the spirit of the Wii Sports era. But if you're on the fence, wait a few months (or a year) to see if the added-later content adds more value. **– LUCAS**

7.5

Brewing Up Trouble in a New World

ATELIER SOPHIE 2: THE ALCHEMIST OF THE MYSTERIOUS DREAM

WITH ITS GORGEOUS, colorful visuals, Atelier Sophie 2: The Alchemist of the Mysterious Dream is no doubt a feast for the eyes on the Nintendo Switch. But don't let this JRPG's wholesome looks fool you – Sophie 2 has plenty of deep gameplay systems to munch on too, and this combo creates a fun dichotomy you can spend more than 40 hours in.

This latest installment from Gust's long-running Atelier series follows 2015's Atelier Sophie: The Alchemist of the Mysterious Book. Sophie 2 tells a separate story from the first game and provides a "Story So Far" movie to help newcomers catch up.

In this sequel, we find alchemist Sophie and her mentor Plachta traveling for Sophie's alchemy license exam. The two are then transported to the dream world of Erde Wiege, where its inhabitants have the freedom to follow their dreams until they wish to return to their world. Erde Wiege doesn't follow the rules of space and time, so Sophie and Plachta meet characters from many time periods, including a few they already have connections with.

I loved this concept because it made the main cast and the overarching story more interesting. It also provided some funny and touching moments as Sophie and Plachta encountered different versions of people they once knew, then got to know them again in a new way.

To aid in telling this story, Gust once again crafted a beautiful world in terms of visuals and sound for players to experience. Erde Wiege has forests, ice caves, volcanos and deserts to explore. The accompanying soundtracks to these settings fit perfectly, from rustic, acoustic tunes in town to more rock-fueled tracks for combat and epic moments. From their Atelier games to the Blue Refection series, Gust doesn't miss when it comes to music.

It wouldn't be an Atelier game without an engrossing crafting system (a.k.a. synthesis), and Sophie 2 delivers. Synthesis involves combining ingredients on a panel to create new items. Each ingredient has one or multiple elements/colors and different component shapes. Your main goal is to align the ingredients on the panel so that components of the same color are beside each other, and so you fill up as much of the panel as possible.

My description is an oversimplification of the system, but I'd need more pages to explain it completely! I'm fairly new to the Atelier series, and I came away from Sophie 2 appreciating the complexity of its crafting, but also feeling overwhelmed.

Sophie 2's combat features a turn-based system with flair and options galore. You have turn-based staples like attacking, defending and using skills and items, and Sophie 2 also introduces new actions. There are Support Blocks, where you can use other characters to block an attack aimed at the main party members, as well as Dual Triggers, where two characters can perform a flashy move together to attack enemies or buff the party.

Like the crafting system, combat has a lot of options, but none of them felt extraneous, especially during the boss fights. I had to throw everything I had at them and was thankful to have many tools at my disposal!

Sophie 2 isn't without some issues on Switch. I experienced bugs with items and exploration. Some ingredient images turned into a bunch of pixels, so I couldn't see what they were. Another recurring issue was while exploring and in combat the entire screen would turn into large lines of swirling pixels, making it impossible to see what was going on. I had to restart the game when this happened and lost progress, which was a bummer since the game is a solid experience otherwise.

I think it's best to start Sophie 2 knowing exactly what you're getting into. Is it a wholesome, cozy game? Yes. Will its gameplay test your knowledge and skill with complex systems? Also yes. But together, they provide a fun experience that longtime and new Atelier fans will enjoy. **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: KOEI TECMO
DEVELOPER: GUST RATING: T

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
RATING: T

A Song of Salt and Iron

TRIANGLE STRATEGY

THE STRATEGY ROLE-PLAYING genre is home to some of the deepest, most impactful games in the pastime – but it's still easy for RPG fans to starve in this land of plenty. Strategy RPGs branch off into so many sub-genres that fans looking for a very particular experience might not find it.

For instance, fans of turn-based strategy RPGs (a sub-genre that includes Nintendo's own Fire Emblem) have long, long lamented Square Enix's failure to craft a new entry in the beloved Final Fantasy Tactics series. The Tactics games implement Final Fantasy's jobs (read: character classes), letting players build unfathomably deep characters that break the game in two.

Square Enix's Triangle Strategy does not give you such free rein with a job-flipping gameplay mechanic. In fact, anyone who approaches this game hoping for a spiritual successor to Tactics will be immediately disappointed. That said, if you're any kind of turn-based RPG fan, you're doing yourself a great disservice if you turn your back on Triangle Strategy. It's an all-timer. While its story is just a touch below "golden," and while its set-in-stone class assignments will turn some people off, Triangle Strategy's grid-based battles are tense and cleverly engineered.

Triangle Strategy takes place 30 years after three kingdoms call a truce to the violent "Saltiron War." The endless fights over salt and iron (natch) left deep scars that make the truce tenuous at best, but treaties and regulated distribution of salt and iron keep all-out war from heating up again – for now.

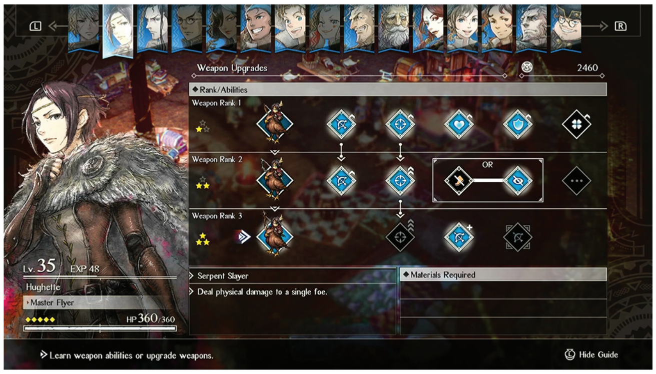
The ties are strengthened further by arranged marriages between the nobles of the rival kingdoms. Our main boy Serenoa, the newly appointed Lord of House Wolffort (one of the Kingdom of Glenbrook's three high houses), is betrothed to Frederica, an illegitimate noblewoman representing the Grand Duchy of Aesfrost. Serenoa is a kind but fierce swordsman, and Frederica proves to be a good assist with her fire magic. They're both good kids who seem determined to make the marriage work, and I'm honestly a sucker for that dynamic in stories.

That's why I don't recommend playing Triangle Strategy with the English voice cast. It's not exactly bad, but it's not quite A-tier – and when a strategy game has *this* much story and *this* much writing, the characters have precious little time to make a good impression.

I became much more engaged with Triangle Strategy's story after I switched to its Japanese cast. Still, despite its intriguing tales of battle and betrayal, there's something about Triangle Strategy that *just* prevents me from elevating its story and characters to sit alongside favorites like Fire Emblem: Three Houses and Final Fantasy XIV. Some of the characters you recruit along the way have interesting motives and heart-wrenching pasts that they deliver in small, separate character vignettes. And, to reiterate, Serenoa and Frederica are a smart, determined couple who are impossible to root against.

But too many other characters are . . . just there. A game as political (and tangled!) as Triangle Strategy is only as strong as its cast, so it's a problem when you're asked to hang with too many blank slates.

But Triangle Strategy's story is saved by its Scales of Conviction, a story mechanic that sends you down the game's plot paths in a decided direction. Triangle Strategy asks you to make hard, serious choices from time to time, and it never blows smoke up your portcullis about choosing the "right" answer. The decisions you make as a leader will make you feel like a monster at least once. It's inevitable. The threat of war is boiling again by the time you really delve into Triangle Strategy's story, and there are no sunny resolutions on the horizon. Serenoa must practice diplomacy to protect his people, who are



still struggling to rebuild after the Saltiron War. His kingdom alone can't handle much strife. But keeping the peace is difficult when there's so much evidence of lies, corruption and crimes against humanity. Sometimes the sword must come out, and people must get hurt.

Take heart. There are very few right answers in Triangle Strategy: only informed answers. This is where the Scales of Conviction come into play. In between fights, Serenoa and his allies take a lot of time to ponder their next move. You visit towns, scour locales for clues and talk to commoners in order to get a clearer picture of whatever conundrum is preventing Serenoa from moving ahead. With knowledge in hand, he turns to his fellows to help him choose what will happen next. If they're determined to take a different path from Serenoa, you can use the intel you gathered earlier to try to change their minds.

You might succeed, or you might not. Either way, the scales determine Serenoa's fate as a young leader.

The Scales of Conviction may bolster Triangle Strategy's story, but even if it was a flat tire, the game's grid-based battle system would be strong enough to shoulder that failure. Each fight challenges you to use the terrain in ways that feel familiar, yet fresh. For example, a tank character like Erador can push weenies off ledges, causing said weenies to incur fall damage – which can be devastating if spikes, traps or hazardous terrain is below. But pushing a jabroni off a cliff also means an exposed back, which is a written invitation for rogues' poisoned blades.

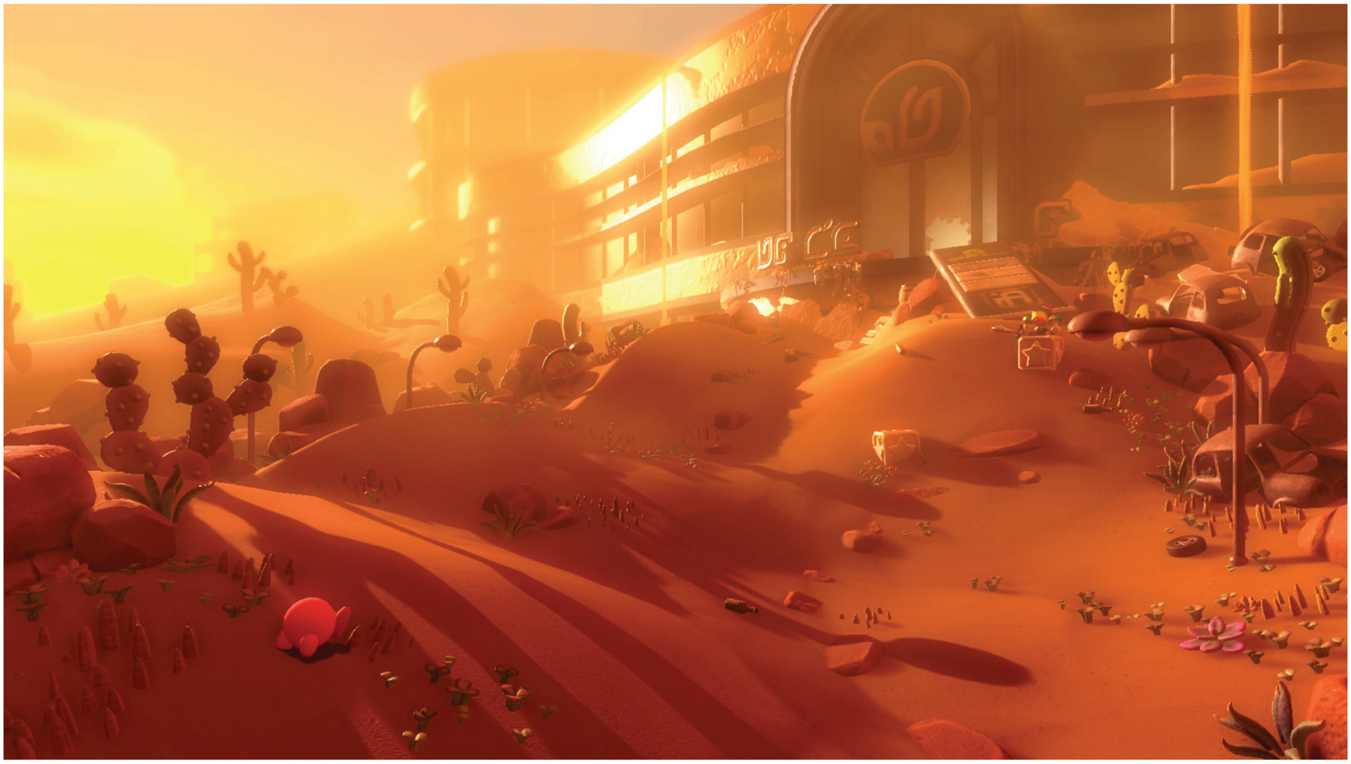
Too many full-plated jerks on the field? Get a weather wizard out there to pour rain on the lot, then fry them with lightning. Just don't get caught in the blast; electricity does not discriminate. Fighting in a mountainous area that severely limits movement? Bring along Jens the blacksmith to build ladders, or order the hawk-riding archer Hughette to shoot from the heights.

Sometimes that's easier said than done, however. The decisions you make in Triangle Strategy determine who will side with Serenoa on his campaign to quell a repeat of the Saltiron War. That means you might never run across several potentially cool allies until you restart with New Game +. And since everyone is locked into their job, sometimes you'll just have to make do with what you've got.

Triangle Strategy is a rigid game. You're set on a path, you're allied with highly specialized warriors and you emerge from the other end via a story chute that's determined by the things you say and do, and by the people you persuade and cheese off. But that rigidness is arguably what makes Triangle Strategy such a sleek, well-built strategy RPG experience. It knows what it wants to be. It knows what it wants to say. It lacks the dizzying chaos that comes with strategy games that let you change class on a whim or breed your next generation of warriors. Triangle Strategy is buttoned-down. It sits at the head of the adult table.

Triangle Strategy may take itself a touch too seriously at times, and not all the characters deliver a backstory worth listening to, but its strengths lift it far above its weaknesses. It's not the second coming of Final Fantasy Tactics, but it deserves recognition for what it is: A truly fine turn-based strategy RPG. **— NADIA**

9.0



An All-New Kind of Kirby Adventure

KIRBY AND THE FORGOTTEN LAND

IT IS WITH full appreciation for irony that I declare the following: Kirby and the Forgotten Land is the most unforgettable adventure Kirby has ever had. And that includes Kirby's Adventure!

For 30 years we've enjoyed the 2D platforming exploits of this pink-hued, pure-hearted hero. He's quested from the Game Boy to the NES, sprinted through the SNES era, jumped to N64 and GBA and DS and 3DS and even made his Switch debut a few years ago – but in all of those appearances, even as other major mascots like Link and Mario and Sonic and Samus Aran all made the leap to three-dimensional exploration, Kirby stayed content with sticking to his sidescrolling roots. He dabbled with 3D in a side mode in a spin-off once, and then again in an eShop-only experiment a few years back. But he's never before, in 30 years, had a fully 3D adventure.

And you would never be able to tell from playing Forgotten Land.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: HAL LABORATORY
RATING: E10+

I honestly have no clue how the developers at HAL have produced a 3D romp with this much polish in their very first attempt. Here's a thought experiment: Imagine the Zelda series had never gone 3D before Breath of the Wild. Just all 2D, top-down Link quests until one day, out of nowhere and with no build-up visible to the game-playing public, they just plopped that masterpiece into existence.

That's how I'm feeling here, having played this Kirby game, as Forgotten Land feels like it's a new iteration of a formula that must have been established with earlier 3D works going back two decades or more. But it's not! It's just its own thing. How is that possible? How is it that this perfect of a game is HAL's first try?

Let me try to explain my praise. The visuals here are strikingly beautiful. Each environment is majestically rendered with incredible care and detail, and, what's more, the camera is always perfectly positioned to guide your eyes . . . which you have to learn to overcome sometimes too, in order to find just-out-of-frame secrets.

The play control is superb. Kirby is so snappy with his movements – for a character who's only ever had to deal with traveling either left or right, he's adjusted to the Z-axis with aplomb. He runs, jumps, slides and sucks up foes easily, and his old standby ability of hovering in mid-air has been retooled to help players correct for missed leaps. He can no longer flap his stubby arms and gain infinite altitude, which is an adjustment, but a necessary one.

The soundtrack is sensational. Not a single stinker in the whole lineup of something like 100 separate songs! The music meshes with the visuals to so perfectly establish a sense of place, no matter whether you're in the midst of a sunny beach scene or lost in the darkness of an amusement park's haunted house. And the whole of the Forgotten Land feels cohesive, too, even as you go from forests to deserts to snow-covered fields. All share the post-apocalyptic decor of abandoned buildings and looming mystery.

Though I invoked Breath of the Wild earlier, a direct comparison shouldn't be drawn between its structure and that seen in Kirby and the Forgotten Land – this is a 3D Kirby adventure, but not a 3D *open-world* adventure. Rather, players are presented with a series of stages more akin to those seen in Super Mario 3D World: fairly linear levels that have a defined end goal of rescuing three Waddle Dees who've been trapped in a cage. Along the way to saving the trapped trio that always marks the conclusion of a level, though, there are tons of side missions and hidden secrets. As many as eight more Waddle Dees may be available to rescue if Kirby manages to either find where they've been hidden in the environment or if he accomplishes extra goals like defeating a mid-boss by using a specific Copy Ability. Rescued Dees then return to Kirby's base of operations in this land, Waddle Dee Town, and the more that make it home safe, the bigger the town becomes!

Waddle Dee Town is perhaps the coziest hub world Nintendo has ever presented. Kirby can eat cakes and burgers, go fishing, take in a movie or even just take a nap in his own bed to get a full health recharge before venturing back out into the adventure. It's peaceful. It's delightful.

And it's essential! Kirby and the Forgotten Land starts off as a fairly easy, happy-go-lucky walk in the park, but the challenge ramps up steadily as you make further progress toward the end credits . . . and beyond! There's an extensive endgame to experience here as well – so much so that I was taken a bit aback at how much more there was to do even beyond the point when you could reasonably claim to have "beaten" the game. Waddle Dee Town takes on more and more of a crucial supporting role as the challenges Kirby faces get tougher, as you'll need to invest in items that boost his health meter, attack power and speed from the item shop that gets built there after you've rescued enough wayward Dees. And you'll also have to make liberal use of the Weapons Shop in town, too, as the Waddle Dee who works there can upgrade Kirby's Copy Abilities to more powerful forms – again, essential. You just won't stand much of a chance against the horrors of pure chaos that appear as the final bosses if you walk into their arenas wielding only the base-level Fire or Cutter or Sword.

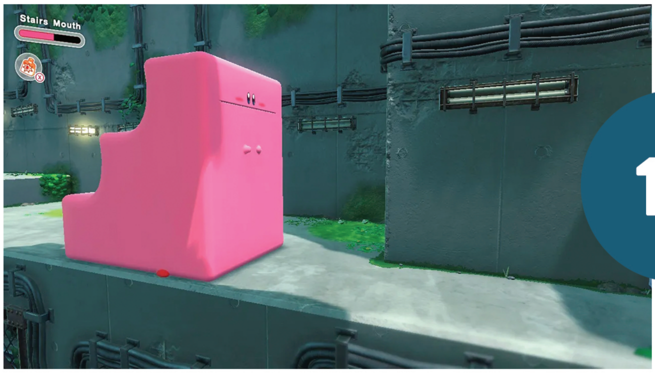
I loved the sense of progression in building up the town and upgrading Kirby's arsenal bit by bit, and I felt like a true warrior by the end of it all . . . but even I, a 30-year Kirby veteran, needed help a time or two. That's when it was amazing to be able to just hand a second controller to one of my sons and have them instantly jump in as Bandana Waddle Dee in the always-accessible co-op mode. Having the extra damage output of Bandana Dee's ceaseless spear was invaluable in taking down a few tough bosses here, and the co-op is handled so well that I can easily praise it as yet another well-earned feather in this game's cap.

Honestly, there's so little in Kirby and the Forgotten Land that I could find fault in. As I played, the only thing that came close to a complaint in my brain was the fact that the mini-boss characters were reused so much. There are only four of them: Wild Edge, Wild Frosty, Wild Bonkers and Fleurina. You encounter each one alone early in the adventure, but then they pop up over and over again in later levels in constantly remixed encounters. Sometimes the arena in which you face them is more dangerous, or you'll have to battle two of them at the same time, or you'll be challenged to conquer them without taking a single hit in order to unlock another displaced Dee. But a fifth mini-boss never appears – it's always those same four, over and over.

Likewise, I thought there'd be a bit more variety in Kirby's Mouthful Mode transformations. A few surprises gave me real smiles, like the hilarious times Kirby morphs into a massive shuffling staircase. But for the most part it was a lot of repeat appearances for the Cone and Vending Machine and Ring forms Nintendo showed off in the pre-release marketing. Though I guess that's just a difference in design philosophy from HAL's developers – a game like Super Mario 3D World would happily introduce a new gameplay idea and then cast it aside after a single use in a single level. But Kirby's caretakers are making sure they get full mileage out of each and every one of their creative ideas. They *like* the Cone form, by golly, and they're going to use it in 20 different ways before they're done with it!

Ultimately, I came to love every decision these designers made for this somehow-still-just-his-first-time-in-3D Kirby adventure. There is so much to love here, and it's so apparent that the whole package was put together with a remarkable amount of respect for this now 30-year-old series.

I encourage every Switch owner to join Kirby on this journey immediately. Go make yourself some memories in the Forgotten Land! **– LUCAS**



10

Nine Films' Worth of LEGO Fun

LEGO STAR WARS: THE SKYWALKER SAGA

A LONG TIME ago, in a galaxy far, far away . . .

After what seems like a millennium since it was initially announced, LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga has finally arrived for the Switch – and it's a doozy! Packed with more stuff than Watto's junk shop and more expansive than the Outer Rim territories, this latest LEGO Star Wars game is one of the best LEGO games ever created – but, like the Force, it has a bit of a dark side keeping it from being a perfect game.

To start off with, this game is big. I mean REALLY big. The developers at Traveller's Tales delayed the release of this game for over a year to finish working on it, and it's easy to see why: The famous (and infamous) locales featured here are expansive and full of detail pulled right out of the movies. Places like Theed, Canto Bight, the Uscru District of Coruscant and the Ewok Village really showcase the work put into designing the levels. In fact, it's easy to get lost while you explore the scenery in some of the denser areas – but luckily a story objective marker called a Waypoint Arrow was included that always guides you back to your next point in the narrative.

I'd recommend taking in the sights of each location, because strictly following the Arrows to each objective not only robs you of the chance to see everything there is to see, but will also cause you to miss many of the extracurriculars contained within each area. (It would also make the game much shorter than intended.)

With all nine main Star Wars movies featured here, you get to experience the whole of the saga in one place – and it is a very silly, well-written experience from beginning to end. There's comedy everywhere, from famous Star Wars silliness like "Hello There!" and a sly reference to Darth Jar Jar to classic meme subject Keyboard Cat showing up in an unexpected way, and even the ever-present mystery: Who is Queen Amidala? The writing does an excellent job of conveying each episode's main story points, while understandably softening the less kid-friendly parts of the saga (sorry, Episode III fans). It's the little details that really sell the time and love that was put into every chapter.

This game is also fully voice acted, and the cast includes such familiar names as Billy Dee Williams, Anthony Daniels, Tom Kane and Dee Bradley Baker. The soundtrack features many of the most iconic pieces created by

John Williams, and it sounds just as wonderful here as it does in the cinematic saga. One thing I was slightly disappointed in was the exclusion of some potentially fantastic play sequences due to the sheer magnitude of the source material. Traveller's Tales wanted to be sure to make everything in this game a new experience so it didn't feel like a rehash of the LEGO Star Wars games that came before, but it's a shame it came at the expense of opportunities like taking part in the Battle of Coruscant in Episode III and some other fun excursions from the past.

Enjoying the story is only part of the experience – at the Galactic Core of it all, this is a LEGO game. And possibly the most refined one yet! All of the prerequisite LEGO game activities are here, including collecting tons of studs, searching for mini-kits and unlocking characters and vehicles for use in Free Play Mode. But this time there's quite a bit more: As you unlock nearly 30 different planets' worth of areas while you complete each of the saga's nine movies, you'll discover there are subquests to conquer, battles to encounter in space directly above each of the planets, starship races, tons of puzzles to complete and much more. You can even partake in a little bounty hunting if you like! There is no shortage of things to do here.

As in past LEGO Star Wars releases, splitscreen couch co-op multiplayer is available, but not in Handheld Mode – and unfortunately there's no online multiplayer either. Also, like the Sith, there can be only two (players).

There are also new additions to the basic actions. Melee attacks are more than just mashing the attack button now: Combos are now available using a mixture of the light attack, heavy attack and jump buttons.

In fact, combos are encouraged for two reasons: Enemies will now block repeated attacks from the same button, and the more you use combos, the more studs you can earn through the combo counter multiplier gauge. Put simply, the more you string together combos, the higher you can push the multiplier for earning studs while attacking enemies. Earning eight times the normal amount of studs is not unheard of!

Glowing blue bricks known as Kyber Bricks are also available to collect and can be used to activate and improve abilities for the characters as a whole, or for each of the different character types specifically. For instance, you can choose to increase the running speed or the distance at which you can collect studs for all characters (both highly recommended, by the way), or, for Jedi characters such as Luke or Rey, you can increase the duration of Jedi mind tricks. There are more than 1,000 Kyber Bricks to find and spend, so the combinations are nearly endless.

Using blasters has also been greatly improved, as an over-the-shoulder view goes into effect when shooting, which really enhances the ability to aim. Adding to the blasting fun are rebuildable barricades that can double as cover and can be ducked behind that are found in the shooting sections of certain levels.

One of my favorite new touches is the inclusion of protocol droid H1-NT, a new character created for the game with a wry sense of humor that dispenses hints and other information wherever he appears. Luckily he appears on the landing pad on every planet, so he's easy to find.

As much fun as this game is, there are a few issues. First of all, there's a definite difference in playing on a TV versus the Switch screen. In Handheld Mode the framerate takes a noticeable dip in more action-intensive sections, as well as during sequences when you control two different sets of characters at the same time (the Rathtar section during The Force Awakens, for example). The camera is also problematic at times, getting stuck when your character is in an enclosed space, making it difficult to get yourself out. I also had issues with Stormtrooper clothes – which are needed for completing some missions and moving the story forward – being stuck in walls or in high places, and therefore being unreachable and necessitating a level restart. Possibly the most concerning was the game crashing when I tried to purchase the Escape Pod vehicle!

Those issues aside, Traveller's Tales has outdone themselves with this new LEGO Star Wars. Their attention to detail and wide variety of activities, coupled with the expansive environments, makes for a fun-filled return to that galaxy far, far away. **– THOR**

9.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS.
DEVELOPER: TT GAMES
RATING: E10+

The Factory's Back in Business

RUNE FACTORY 5

I DIDN'T REALIZE how much I needed to slow down until I started playing Rune Factory 5.

We're not even halfway through 2022, but this year has already been packed with big video game releases. I don't know about you, but sometimes I get too focused on checking games off my list rather than taking my time to enjoy them. It's easy to do when there's so much to play! Thankfully, Rune Factory 5, with its casual gameplay loop and wholesome vibes, was the perfect reminder for me to stop and smell the toyherbs.

The latest entry in this series that combines farming sim and action-RPG elements launched on the Switch in March. It came nearly a decade after its previous mainline entry, Rune Factory 4, which debuted on the 3DS. The Rune Factory games are standalone, so you can jump into this one without playing previous games.

Players begin their journey as an amnesiac male or female adventurer: Ares or Alice. You forge a new path in the quaint town of Rigbarth and join SEED, a peacekeeping organization that protects the townspeople from outside threats.

Becoming a member of SEED sets you on a journey to investigate strange occurrences around Rigbarth, but the main story is a small sliver of what you can do. Once you've completed the basic tutorials, the game opens up, and I appreciated having lots of options at my disposal early on. I didn't feel pressured to complete the main quests quickly because there were several experiences to try out!

Farming, which will net you crops to ship, gift and cook, is a big focus in the game. The system is standard: You till a field, plant some seeds and water them (and the convenient ability to hold, carry and ship multiple crops returns from Rune Factory 4). More seeds become available as you harvest more types of crops, so there's incentive to try them all.

Exploring dungeons progresses the main story and makes use of the game's action combat system, where you can equip different weapons, use Rune Abilities and invite townspeople along to help you. The new link attacks you can execute with your allies look great and are definitely a highlight.

The dungeons are short — and easy. The bosses all just follow simple patterns. I don't think Rune Factory 5 needed to be difficult, but the game could've had a little more challenge, especially when you have a full party.

Speaking of allies, the townspeople of Rigbarth are my favorite part of this game. This group of quirky characters cracked me up constantly. A few standouts include master carpenter Palmo, whose optimism has no limits, and Martin, who talks to his blacksmith tools when no one is looking. (One is named Tiddles!)

You can also pursue romance with the game's bachelors and bachelorettes. I suggest making multiple saves, though, because choosing just one to woo is no easy task!

Other gameplay features include fishing, which has a simple but rewarding minigame that I kept going back to, and crafting, which is overly complicated. You have to buy several equipment tables in order to craft and cook everything. There's a knife table, a pot table, an oven table and so on — I'm not sure why they weren't all just combined.

To make matters worse, placing these tables (or any furniture) in your home is a huge pain. The game won't allow you to line up furniture against walls, and if you want them to be straight, it takes a while because the controls are too sensitive. In a game like this where home customization is important, it's a bummer such a basic system isn't better.

Rune Factory 5 also brings a big shift in visuals from Rune Factory 4's isometric style to a 3D world with a third-person perspective. It's a change that makes sense, given that the Switch has more power and capabilities, but it comes with some growing pains: Rune Factory 5 is bogged down by performance issues. I encountered varying loading times and framerate drops whenever I entered and exited buildings. The game performs considerably better in Handheld Mode compared to TV Mode, but neither experience is ideal.

Also, the environments of Rune Factory 5 are hit or miss. The bright colors of the world and interior environments look good, but other areas outside of town feel flat and empty.

While these issues do bring down the experience, I enjoyed my time with Rune Factory 5 and I'm hopeful that these shortcomings will result in an even better entry in the future if we get one. (And hopefully sooner than a decade away, too.) Rune Factory 5 captures what matters most in a farming sim: a charming world and cast, and a cozy experience that will keep you coming back whenever you want to take it easy. **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: MARVELOUS (XSEED)
DEVELOPER: HAKAMA
RATING: T

7.5

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the last two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

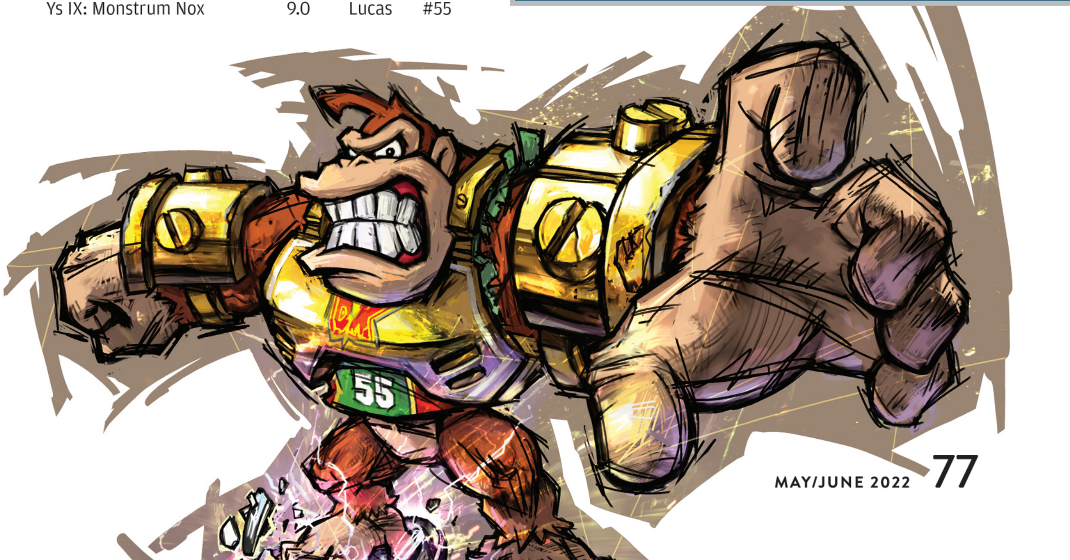
SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Alex Kidd in Miracle World DX	7.5	David	#54
Animal Crossing: New Horizons	9.0	Rebecca	#46
Ary and the Secret of Seasons	6.0	Lucas	#49
Atelier Ryza 2: Lost Legends & the Secret Fairy	8.0	Maggie	#51
Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia	6.5	Lucas	#51
Balan Wonderworld	5.0	Lucas	#52
Big Brain Academy: Brain vs. Brain	8.0	Kris	#58
Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night	7.5	Tony	#48
Blue Reflection: Second Light	8.5	Maggie	#57
Bravely Default II	9.0	Nadia	#52
Catherine: Full Body	8.5	Jonathan	#49
Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics	8.5	Lucas	#48
Cobra Kai: The Karate Kid Saga Continues	6.5	Kris	#50
Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time!	8.5	David	#52
Cris Tales	6.5	Maggie	#57
Cruis'n Blast	8.0	David	#56
DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power	7.0	Kris	#53
Deadly Premonition 2: A Blessing in Disguise	7.0	Jonathan	#49
Doki Doki Literature Club Plus!	8.5	Rebecca	#55
Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot	6.0	Kris	#56
Friday the 13th: The Game – Ultimate Slasher Edition	8.0	Kevin C.	#46
G.I. Joe: Operation Blackout	6.5	Lucas	#54
Hot Wheels Unleashed	7.5	Lucas	#56
Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity	8.5	Tony	#50
Indivisible	7.0	Tony	#47
John Wick Hex	7.5	Chris	#51
Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory	7.0	Tony	#50
Langrisser I & II	8.5	David	#46
Mario Golf: Super Rush	9.0	Lucas	#54
Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit	9.5	Lucas	#49
Mario Party Superstars	8.5	Lucas	#57
Metroid Dread	9.0	Tony	#56
Miitopia	7.5	Brett	#53
Monster Hunter Rise	9.0	Lucas	#52
Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin	9.0	Maggie	#54
Moving Out	8.0	Lucas	#47
NEO: The World Ends with You	8.0	Rebecca	#55
NERF Legends	4.0	Lucas	#57
New Pokémon Snap	9.0	Lucas	#53
Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom – Prince's Edition	8.5	Brett	#56
Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl	7.5	Brett	#56
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 2: Grand Prix	7.0	David	#50
No More Heroes III	9.5	Jonathan	#55
Paper Mario: The Origami King	8.5	Brett	#48
Paw Patrol Mighty Pups: Save Adventure Bay!	8.5	Lucas	#51
Persona 5 Strikers	9.0	Maggie	#52
Pikmin 3 Deluxe	9.5	Lucas	#50
Pokémon Brilliant Diamond	6.5	Rebecca	#57
Pokémon Legends: Arceus	9.0	Lucas	#58
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX	8.0	Lucas	#46
Pokémon Shining Pearl	6.0	Lucas	#57
Puyo Puyo Tetris 2	8.5	Rebecca	#50
R-Type Final 2	7.5	Jonathan	#53
Rune Factory 4 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#46
Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin	8.5	Lucas	#50
Shadowverse: Champion's Battle	8.0	Maggie	#55
Shin Megami Tensei V	8.0	Meghan	#57
Sonic Colors: Ultimate	5.0	Kris	#58
Story of Seasons: Friends of Mineral Town	7.5	Rebecca	#48
Story of Seasons: Pioneers of Olive Town	6.5	Rebecca	#53
Super Mario 3D All-Stars	7.0	Lucas	#49
Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury	10	Lucas	#51
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania	8.5	David	#56
The Caligula Effect 2	8.0	Maggie	#58
The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles	9.0	Rebecca	#54
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel III	9.0	Maggie	#49
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel IV	9.0	Maggie	#52
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD	9.0	Lucas	#54
The Outer Worlds	8.0	Matthew L.	#47
The Wonderful 101: Remastered	9.0	Jonathan	#47
Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore	7.5	Matthew L.	#46
Transformers: Battlegrounds	7.5	Lucas	#54
Trials of Mana	8.5	Brett	#47
WarioWare: Get It Together!	7.5	Rebecca	#56
World's End Club	6.5	Kris	#55
Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition	10	Lucas	#48
Ys IX: Monstrum Nox	9.0	Lucas	#55

THE NP OPINION
MARIO STRIKERS CHARGED

NINTENDO POWER WAS still around the last time the Strikers series saw a sequel, and Drew Williams put it through its paces for his 8.5-rated review in NP #219. He kicked off his thoughts by reiterating what's become a fairly popular opinion: "Mario Strikers Charged isn't really a soccer game – or even a sports game. It's more like a vehicular combat game without the vehicles." Mario's various spins on sports have never been too realistic, as we've pointed out earlier in this issue, but that leaves room for actual sim series to co-exist in the industry, so it's no bad thing.

Drew seemed to enjoy the cartoon violence of the whole spectacle the most, saying "It's almost as much fun to clothesline opponents as it is to score goals." He then rounded out his review by drawing attention to the online features of Strikers Charged – it was only the second Wii game to support playing against strangers over the internet. That was the game's "real selling point," said Drew. He's no doubt thrilled that Battle League will offer a much more robust set of online multiplayer options! **– LUCAS**



ROM HACKING

Tecmo Bowl Forever!

Dedicated fans are ensuring this classic stays current.

WE'VE FEATURED A few ROM hacks in these pages in the past – projects like Super Mario Land 2 DX, which added full color to that Game Boy classic in the style of some of Nintendo's actual Game Boy Color DX ports, and a modded version of the original Legend of Zelda that swapped Link and Zelda's roles, letting the princess be the one who went on the Triforce-collecting quest across Hyrule. Hacks like these are fans taking games into their own hands in order to answer "What if?" questions that video game companies rarely dedicate any official time to.

Well, how about "What if Tecmo had never stopped making NES football games?"

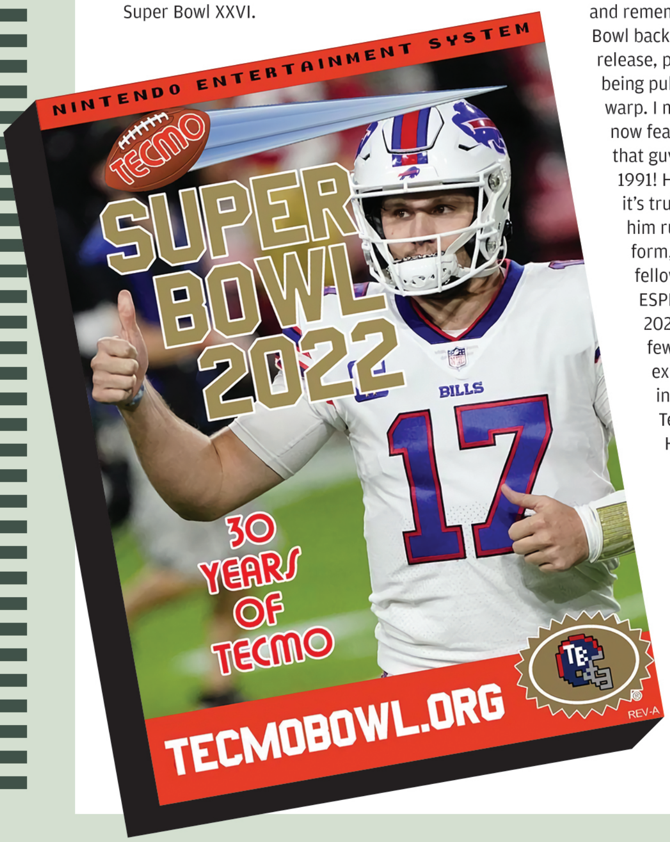
For over 30 years now, Tecmo Super Bowl has resonated with NFL aficionados as one of, if not *the*, greatest football video games of all time. A sequel to the earlier NES Tecmo Bowl, it launched in December 1991, in the middle of an NFL season that ultimately saw the Redskins triumph over the Bills in Super Bowl XXVI.

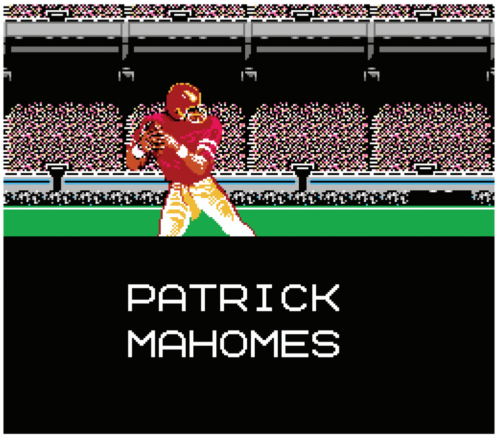
Players of Tecmo Super Bowl were able to run their own versions of that same season, with the same rosters of players across all of the NFL's teams. But once the next season began later in 1992, those rosters were out-of-date. The Tecmo Bowl series got a few other installments afterward, but for the most part the Madden franchise swept in and took over the role of being the NFL's video game standard-bearer, and the place most football fans were expected to turn to for up-to-date rosters and division lineups.

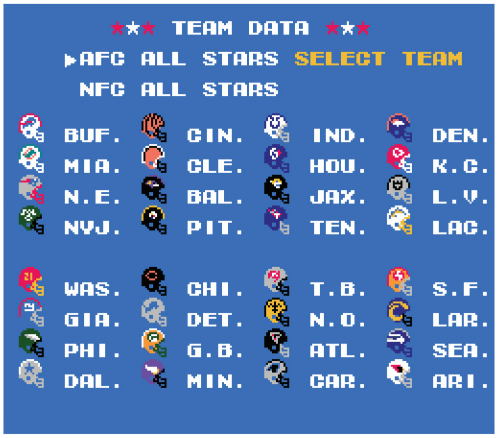
Well, the most diehard of Tecmo Bowlers weren't having that! For nearly 15 years now, a team of NES programmers has hacked into and updated 1991's Tecmo Super Bowl to bring it up to speed with current NFL player rosters year after year. The most recent release as of this writing is Tecmo Super Bowl 2022, which also happened to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the NES original!

As someone who was there in '91 and remembers playing Tecmo Super Bowl back when it was a brand-new release, playing this version is like being pulled into some kind of time warp. I mean, the intro cutscene now features Patrick Mahomes – that guy wasn't even born yet in 1991! He's only 26 years old! So it's truly weird to be able to have him run around the field in 8-bit form, surrounded by a squad of fellow players you could see on ESPN on any given day here in 2022. And even more odd? A few entire teams didn't even exist way back then. No one in '91 had ever heard of the Tennessee Titans or the Houston Texans.

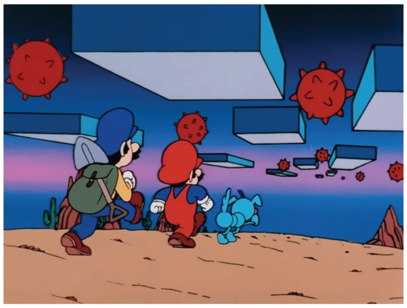
What's more, the team behind this hack has also enhanced the gameplay with extra features like playbook editing and being able to adjust the length of each quarter. It's a truly impressive effort, and it's an annual one, so check out each new release every year from here on out too! **– LUCAS**







TecmoBowl.org



FAN-MADE FILM RESTORATION

Mario's Original Movie!

The legendary anime "Super Mario Bros.: Peach-hime Kyushutsu Dai Sakusen!" has been remastered into 4K!

I'VE GOT A recommendation for your family's next movie night: Pop some popcorn, settle yourselves down on the couch and fire up the old Super Mario Bros. movie! No, not the live-action film from 1993 (though that's a fine choice too), I'm talking about the original Mario movie: the anime from 1986!

"Super Mario Bros.: Peach-hime Kyushutsu Dai Sakusen!" (most often translated as "The Great Mission to Rescue Princess Peach") is a wild ride of a film to revisit now, over three and a half decades after its original release. It was a Japan-exclusive theatrical adventure that adapted the storyline of the first Super Mario Bros. game.

What's wild about it is that since the movie was made so early in the existence of the overall Mario franchise, and since its creators only had one game to pull references from, it's not at all in line with the norms that Nintendo later established for these same characters. For example, Mario and Luigi aren't plumbers in this take (or tradesmen of any kind) – instead, they're grocery store clerks! Luigi is also depicted as being obsessed with treasure, as he carries a shovel with him through the adventure and is constantly stopping to dig up coins (because they're all buried, rather than floating in the air). For some reason they have a dog named Kibidango.

Even more interesting than what the film got wrong, though, is what it accidentally got right! Remember, this was made in 1986 – and yet it has a scene in which Mario steals and rides Lakitu's cloud, which wasn't possible in the games until Super Mario World, five years later! The brothers also find and ride on a flying airship, years before those became a fixture of the Mario games starting in Super Mario Bros. 3. And *(minor spoiler here),* Mario ultimately defeats King Koopa in their final battle by grabbing him by the tail, spinning him around in a circle and flinging him into the sky – a full decade before doing that in Super Mario 64!

Perhaps all those moments are just coincidences – or perhaps Nintendo's game makers watched this movie and got inspired to include those ideas in later Super Mario sequels. You can draw your own conclusions after watching the film for yourself, which you can now do for free via YouTube!

A team of restoration artists actually got their hands on one of the original projector reels used to exhibit the movie to Japanese audiences decades ago. They scanned the whole thing, then underwent a detailed (and surely time-consuming) process to color-correct the dingy first result and bring it back to the brilliance that original viewers would've seen on the big screen. What's more, the whole movie is now upscaled to 4K – so this actually looks better than it originally did back in the '80s!

Supporting the beautified visuals is a redone audio presentation as well, and improved English subtitles translating the Japanese dialogue. It's an impressive effort all around, and I again must recommend that you take the time to see it! No Mario fan's knowledge of the franchise is complete until they've watched The Great Mission! **– LUCAS**

YouTube.com/watch?v=vzlZy9zpw0Q

REALITY STAR SPOTLIGHT

SUPER MARYANNE

Survivor meets Nintendo again in the wake of our interview!

DEAR, LOYAL READERS, I must offer my profuse apologies up front for any of you who aren't fans of reality TV shows, but for me this is just too much fun not to immortalize in NF's pages as this issue comes to a close.

Two issues ago we brought you an interview with Davie Rickenbacker and Nick Wilson, two contestants on the 37th season of Survivor that aired a few years ago. The two of them bonded in the game over a shared love of Nintendo video games (among other "nerdy" things) and Nick was ultimately propelled to the million-dollar prize that season in part due to the strength of their friendship. Playing Nintendo really paid off big time for him!

One moment I specifically pointed out to Davie and Nick was that the Mario Kart series got mentioned on the air during their season due to their tribe having these kinds of conversations early on . . . and now it's happened again! In the 42nd season of Survivor that's currently airing here in the spring of 2022, another pair of castaways was caught on camera chatting about their own Mario Kart experiences: Lindsay Dolashewich and Maryanne Oketch.

Maryanne is the one I want to give a special spotlight to, though, as she took the conversation another step further by confirming that she prefers to play as her own Mii. Miis seriously got mentioned on Survivor! As someone whose top two interests in entertainment are Nintendo and Survivor, that level of convergence between the two truly blew my mind.

What's more, Maryanne later followed up on Twitter to share a few screenshots of her Mii in action and confirm her preferred build when racing online in Mario Kart 8 Deluxe. She chooses the Pipe Frame kart, the Crimson Slim tires and the Bowser Kite glider. Beyond that, she equips her Mii character with the Captain Falcon outfit – that's irrefutable proof of her serious fandom right there, because that outfit is only accessible if you own a rare Captain Falcon amiibo!

That outfit and kart combination clearly works for her, too, as she posted proof of a first-place finish against proven international competition too. Could that be a portent of a first-place finish in Survivor too? No spoilers here! Tune in to CBS on Wednesday nights or stream the show on Paramount+! **— LUCAS**

@maryanneoketch

BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

NEXT ISSUE

Another major milestone is upon us: The next issue of Nintendo Force Magazine will be our 60*th* publication! To celebrate, we'll be hitting the streets . . . and hitting the punks who like to wander those streets, looking for fights. It's going to be a celebration of brawlers headlined by one of the most exciting sequels that genre's seen, **River City Girls 2**!

We'll do our best to prepare you for Misako and Kyoko's return to action, as well as fully celebrate the entire history of the beat-'em-ups that paved the way for such modern pavement-pounding punchfests. We'll also continue this issue's coverage by reviewing the new **Mario Strikers**, shine a spotlight on **Splatoon 3** and more. Get it!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #60:

RIVER CITY GIRLS 2

RIVER CITY GIRLS ZERO

DAWN OF THE MONSTERS

MARIO STRIKERS: BATTLE LEAGUE

SPLATOON 3

ADVANCE WARS 1+2: RE-BOOT CAMP

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3

FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS: THREE HOPES

SPIDERSAURS

LIVE A LIVE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE COWABUNGA COLLECTION

MARIO KART 8 DELUXE: BOOSTER COURSE PASS - WAVE 2

AND MUCH **MORE!**

JULY/ AUGUST 2022

AN ALL-STAR LINEUP!

WHO'S MY FAVORITE pro baseball player? Why, Bobson Dugnutt, of course!

OK, so this is a bit of a throwback, because this meme traces back to a viral tweet that was tweeted back in December 2016. But this is our first sports-dedicated issue since then! (Our first ever, actually.) So we've got to acknowledge the greatness of Fighting Baseball before we bring our time together entirely to a close.

Fighting Baseball was the name of a game released on the Super Famicom in Japan in 1995. But it was first developed and released as an SNES title in the United States in 1994 — here it was known as MLBPA Baseball, published by Electronic Arts. With the MLBPA license secured, EA was able to use all the real names of players who were active in Major League Baseball at the time . . . but that license didn't extend to the Japanese version.

So, in localizing the game from its original English into Japanese, the new developers in Japan had to somehow come up with over 700 new names to replace the real ones! Apparently they weren't entirely familiar with "normal" American names, so the just-a-bit-off names they came up with are full of unintentional hilarity.

Which pro team wouldn't want to draft Glenallen Mixon? What young child wouldn't want to own a real Willie Dustice rookie card, or score an autograph from Sleve McDichael? Maybe, if you really practice hard, you too could someday play in the big leagues, just like Dwigt Rortugal! **— LUCAS**

SLEVE MCDICHAEL
ONSON SWEEMEY
DARRYL ARCHIDELD
ANATOLI SMORIN
REY MCSRIFF
GLENALLEN MIXON
MARIO MCRLWAIN
RAUL CHAMGERLAIN
KEVIN NOGILNY
TONY SMEHRIK
BOBSON DUGNUTT

WILLIE DUSTICE
JEROMY GRIDE
SCOTT DOURQUE
SHOWN FURCOTTE
DEAN WESREY
MIKE TRUK
DWIGT RORTUGAL
TIM SANDAELE
KARL DANDLETON
MIKE SERNANDEZ
TODD BONZALEZ

P.S. If you want to see the full list of 700+ ridiculous names, search for "More Than Just Bobson Dugnutt" on Reddit!

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